

**PREPARING PREVENTING
AND RESPONDING**

A SCHOOL THREAT

**PREVENTION RESOURCE
GUIDE**

School Threats Prevention Resource Guide

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School Threats Prevention Resource Guide

Introduction: Threats and targeted attacks against schools has increased dramatically since 1970, but when these attacks take place they are heart breaking and strike fear into communities across the nation. However the factors of each individual attack are not all the same but there are a few things that are consistent with almost every attack. A study performed by the Secret service found that these attacks on schools are almost ALWAYS planned, and it was unusual for the attacker to threaten these victims before that attack occurred, also in the majority of cases parents, teachers, and other authoritative figures noticed a change in behavior before the attack that concerned them. Another major similarity is the fact that the vast majority of the attackers were current students with some being former students. If more communities, learning facilities, law enforcement agencies, mental health specialists, among others knew the warning signs to look for in these students and have a plan in place that has been practiced these targeted attacks could possibly be avoided. No one school or law agency or any of the others mentioned above have the essential tools and proficiency necessary to do this singlehandedly. This guide is to help those establishments to recognize and respond prior to potentially at-risk behaviors and threat actors and alleviate or eliminate the possibility for harm.

Plan: Targeted school attacks can happen in any school and community. Thus, it is vital that each individual community have a plan to identify, prevent, and in unfortunate cases respond to a violent targeted school attack. Having a plan in places should drastically improve school safety and should start by addressing security weaknesses; for example having multiple entrances unlocked and open to anyone during school hours, or not having on campus security. School staff and local law enforcement should familiarize themselves with the vast potential threats and stakeholders develop tactics that may inhibit an attack in the first place.

Practice: After plans for specific attacks are developed they should be looked over and updated every year if needed and practiced periodically over the course of the school year. Due to the fact that plans that have not been updated and have not been introduced to or practiced by students and school staff does not adequately provide the proper protection. In Virginia it is a law to have school safety audits and school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plans (Virginia Code §22.1-279.8).

Communicate: Open lines of communication in which the community, students and faculty and family can trust are crucial to address concerns and identify possible threats and follow up on deterrence strategies and respond swiftly in the event of an attack.

Law Enforcement Contact with Schools: It is evident that local law enforcement agencies consistently work with schools on a number of concerns, it is vital that they deliberate and collaborate with school administrators, faculty, students, and family unswervingly on concerns in relation to school violence. Law enforcement agencies have a unique understanding and proficiency in handling with said problems and with preparation to help evade targeted attacks and other forms of school violence.

Targeted School Attacks

- Attacks are planned, prepped, bases on on-going grievance
- Lead time gives advantage to threat assessment response
- 59% of attacks are during the day
- 63% of attackers have a known history of weapons use
- 68% get weapons from home or a relative
- 93% planned in advance
- 95% by current students
- 75% of attackers felt bullied/ persecuted



The School Shooter – A Quick Reference Guide

FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU)



REMEMBER

- There is no one “profile” of a school shooter.
- ☒ School shootings are rarely impulsive acts and are typically planned out in advance by the offender.
- ☒ Prior to most school shootings, other persons (friends, peers) knew that the offender was contemplating violence.
- ☒ Few attackers issue direct threats to their targets before the attack.
- ☒ Common motives behind an attack include revenge, a desire for dominant control, and a hope for infamy/notoriety.
- ☒ While impossible to predict violent behavior, it is possible to prevent some attacks via effective threat assessment and management strategies.

Threat Assessment - 11 Key Questions (Safe Schools Initiative, USSS/ED, 2002)

1. What are the student’s motive(s) and goals?
2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?
3. Has the student shown inappropriate interest in school attacks, weapons, and/or mass violence?
4. Has the student engaged in any attack-related behaviors?
5. Does the student have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?
6. Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation and/or despair?
7. Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?
8. Does the student see violence as an acceptable/desirable way to solve problems?
9. Is the student’s version of events consistent with his/her actions?
10. Are other people concerned about the student’s potential for violence?
11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of an attack?

Descriptive Statistics and Motives (SSI, 2002)

- ☒ 27% of attackers exhibited interest in violent movies.
- ☒ 37% of attackers exhibited interest in violence in their own writings, poems, essays, and journal entries.
- ☒ 59% of attacks occurred during the school day.
- ☒ 63% of attackers had a known history of weapons use.
- ☒ 68% acquired the weapon used from their own home or that of a relative.
- ☒ 93% of attackers planned out the attack in advance.
- ☒ 93% of attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the attack that caused others to be concerned.
- ☒ 95% of attackers were current students.
- ☒ 24% motivated by desire for attention or recognition.
- ☒ 27% motivated by suicide or desperation.
- ☒ 34% motivated by attempt to solve a problem.
- ☒ 54% had multiple motives.
- ☒ 61% motivated by desire for revenge.
- ☒ 75% felt bullied/persecuted/threatened by others.

Concerning Behaviors and Potential Warning Signs*

- ☒ Significant personal loss, humiliation, or setback that is either real or perceived.
- ☒ Inability to perceive or lack of interest in pursuing non-violent resolutions to a grievance.
- ☒ Deliberate or inadvertent disclosure of violent plans or of impending ominous events; verbal/written expressions of intent to commit highly dramatic acts (against self or others) in the near future.
- ☒ Pervasive, persistent fantasies where the offender victimizes others through dominant violence.
- ☒ Increasingly problematic or concerning interpersonal interactions with others. Others are concerned that the individual may become violent.
- ☒ Significantly diminished resiliency or compromised ability to cope with stressors or setbacks.
- Increased isolation, depression, and withdrawal from normally pleasurable activities. Decreased performance at school (may appear to be in a “downward spiral”).
- ☒ Contextually inappropriate or dramatically escalated interest in past attacks or attackers.
- ☒ Contextually inappropriate or dramatically escalated interest in obtaining firearms and/or explosives.
- ☒ Contextually inappropriate accumulation of or escalated interest in tactical gear, clothing or paraphernalia.
- ☒ Evaporating buffers and fading obstacles to violence (e.g. diminishing fear of death/incarceration; loss of stabilizing family member).
- ☒ Increasing sense of recklessness (e.g. financial, sexual) suggesting a disregard for future consequences.
- ☒ Pre-attack research and planning (e.g. site surveillance).
- ❖ Contextually inappropriate or dramatic change in appearance (e.g. hair, tattoos).
- ❖ Abrupt and unexplained cessation in the use of alcohol, drugs, and/or medications (“cleansing/purifying”).
- ❖ Creation of a “legacy token” (e.g. manifesto, video) designed to claim credit for an act of violence and to articulate motives behind an attack. Staging of the legacy token for distribution or discovery.
- ❖ Boundary probing/testing or circumnavigation of security measures to penetrate into a restricted area.
- ❖ Procuring the means for an attack (e.g. stockpiling of weapons/ammunition, IEDs).
- ❖ Pre-attack staging or “cocooning” in a secluded location to physically and mentally prepare for the attack.

Resources

- ☒ Persons suspected of planning a school shooting or other act of targeted violence should be reported via 911 to your local police department or school threat assessment team.
- The BAU’s Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC) is the only multi-agency behavioral threat assessment team in the U.S. Government. Requests for BTAC assistance can be made via the BAU Coordinator in your local FBI Field Office.
- “*Making Prevention a Reality*” is a helpful guide produced by the BAU, available for download at: <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/making-prevention-a-reality.pdf/view>

School Threats Prevention Resource Guide: A Shared Responsibility

Federal Potential School Threat Related Statutes

The following statutes are the most likely to be involved in a school threat situation. If two or more individuals are involved in an agreement to commit any offense a conspiracy charge may be applied. A conspiracy does not mandate a formal agreement or formal assignment or responsibilities, Nor does it require that the article of the conspiracy actually have been committed. An agreement to commit an offense and any act in continuance of the offence will be sufficient ion the conspiracy charge.

These statutes and others may provide the base for issuing a subpoenas, searching warrants or other law enforcements measures without charging or arrest. In the apt cases, prosecution can also end in the detention of a defendant and the potential for a mental health assessment and treatment, if need be. In other words, these statutes are one tool to be used in a continuum of resources that can be applied to threats to schools.

The following list of codes is not anticipated to be fully comprehensive of all statutes that may be available in any scenario. Nor is each summary provided below necessarily a precise recitation of the constitutional language. Due to the reasons above, consultation with the United States Attorney's Office, Federal Bureau of Investigation or other appropriate law enforcement agency is strongly encouraged where reliance upon any of the federal statutes is being considered.

18 United States Code § 33 -- Destruction of Motor Vehicles or Motor Vehicle Facilities

(a) Whoever willfully, with intent to endanger the safety of any person on board or anyone who he believes will board the same, or with a reckless disregard for the safety of human life, damages, disables, destroys, tampers with, or places or causes to be placed any explosive or other destructive substance in, upon, or in proximity to, any motor vehicle which is used, operated, or employed in interstate or foreign commerce, or its cargo or material used or intended to be used in connection with its operation; or

Whoever willfully, with like intent, damages, disables, destroys, sets fire to, tampers with, or places or causes to be placed any explosive or other destructive substance in, upon, or in proximity to any garage, terminal, structure, supply, or facility used in the operation of, or in support of the operation of, motor vehicles engaged in interstate or foreign commerce or otherwise makes or causes such property to be made unworkable, unusable, or hazardous to work or use; or

Whoever, with like intent, willfully disables or incapacitates any driver or person employed in connection with the operation or maintenance of the motor vehicle, or in any way lessens the ability of such person to perform his duties as such; or whoever willfully attempts or conspires to do any of the aforesaid acts—

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18 United States Code § 35 -- Imparting or Conveying False Information Regarding Modes of Transportation

(a) Whoever imparts or conveys or causes to be imparted or conveyed false information, knowing the information to be false, concerning an attempt or alleged attempt being made or to be made, to do any act which would be a crime prohibited by this chapter or chapter 97 or chapter 111 of this title *[generally, these sections involve attempts or threats to damage or disrupt motor vehicles, including buses (school buses), boats, aircraft, or trains that are used in, operated in, affect, or support interstate commerce, or any garage, terminal, supply or other facility used by those modes of transportation or to support the operation thereof]* shall be subject to a civil penalty of not more than \$1,000 which shall be recoverable in a civil action brought in the name of the United States.

(b) Whoever willfully and maliciously, or with reckless disregard for the safety of human life, imparts or conveys or causes to be imparted or conveyed false information, knowing the information to be false, concerning an attempt or alleged attempt being made or to be made, to do any act which would be a crime prohibited by this chapter or chapter 97 or chapter 111 of this title [see above]—

18 United States Code § 229 -- Chemical Weapons

It shall be unlawful for any person to —

- (1) Develop, produce, otherwise acquire, transfer directly or indirectly, receive, stockpile, retain, own, possess, or use, or threaten to use, any chemical weapon
- (2) To assist or induce, in any way any person to violate paragraph (1), or to attempt or conspire to violate paragraph (1)

18 United States Code § 249 -- Hate Crimes

(a)(1) Offenses Involving Actual or Perceived Race, Color, Religion, or National Origin. — Willfully causes or attempts to cause bodily injury to any person through the use of fire, a firearm, a dangerous weapon, or an explosive or incendiary device, because of actual or perceived race, color, religion, or national origin of any person.

(a)(2) Offenses Involving Actual or Perceived Religion, National Origin, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, or Disability. —

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(A) Willfully causes or attempts to cause bodily injury to any person through the use of fire, a firearm, a dangerous weapon, or an explosive or incendiary device, because of the actual or perceived religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability of any person – and conduct crosses a state line or uses a channel, facility, or instrument in interstate commerce [e.g. internet, social media, telephone] or uses a firearm, dangerous weapon, or other weapon that traveled in interstate or foreign commerce; or the conduct otherwise affect interstate or foreign commerce

18 United States Code § 844 -- Possession of Explosive Materials

- (i) It shall be unlawful for any person –
- (3) who is an unlawful user of or addicted to any controlled substance;
 - (4) who has been adjudicated as a mental defective or who has been committed to a mental institution;
 - (5) who, being an unlawful alien in the U.S

to possess any explosives which have been shipped or transported in interstate or foreign commerce

18 United States Code § 844 -- Explosive Materials Threats

(e) Whoever, through the use of the mail, telephone, internet willfully makes any threat, or maliciously conveys false information, concerning an attempt or alleged attempt being made to kill, injure, or intimidate any individual or unlawfully to damage or destroy any building, vehicle, or other property by means of fire or an explosive

- JM 9-63.922 -- Whenever possible, § 844(e) “Bomb threat” will not be used involving bomb threat by student against school – will be deferred to state/local authority

18 United States Code § 875 -- Interstate Threats to Injure Another Person (Including Online Threats)

(c) Whoever transmits in interstate or foreign commerce any communication containing any threat to kidnap any person or any threat to injure the person of another.

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18 United States Code § 876 -- Mailing Threatening Communications

(c) Whoever knowingly deposits [in the U.S. mail] or cause to be delivered [via the U.S. Postal Service] a communication with or without a name or designating mark subscribed thereto, addressed to any other person and containing any threat to kidnap any person or any threat to injure the person of the addressee or another.

18 United States Code § 922 -- Firearms and Ammunition - Unlawful Acts

(d) It shall be unlawful for any person to sell or otherwise dispose of any firearm or ammunition to any person knowing or having reasonable cause to believe that such person –

- (3) is an unlawful user of or addicted to any controlled substance;
- (4) has been adjudicated as a mental defective or who has been committed to a mental institution;
- (5) is an unlawful alien in the U.S

(g) It shall be unlawful for any person –

- (3) who is an unlawful user of or addicted to any controlled substance;
- (4) who has been adjudicated as a mental defective or who has been committed to a mental institution;
- (5) who, being an unlawful alien in the U.S

to possess or receive any firearm or ammunition made or transported from outside the state

(j) It shall be unlawful for any person to receive or possess a stolen firearm or ammunition [that was made or shipped from outside the state] having reasonable cause to believe that the firearm or ammunition was stolen

(q) School Zone

(2)(A) It shall be unlawful for any individual knowingly to possess a firearm [that was made or shipped from outside the state] at a place that the individual knows, or has reasonable cause to believe is a school zone. [does not prohibit possession of unloaded firearm in locked container in a motor vehicle or possession of a firearm for use in a program approved by the school in the school zone – or by law enforcement or a person in accordance with a contract with the school]

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(3)(A) It shall be unlawful for any person, knowingly or with reckless disregard for the safety of another, to discharge or attempt to discharge a firearm in a school zone.

[Exceptions for law enforcement or a person acting in accordance with a contract with the school]

(x) Distribution to Juvenile & Juvenile Possession

(1) It shall be unlawful for a person to sell, deliver, or otherwise transfer to a person who the transferor knows is a juvenile –

(A) A handgun; or

(B) Ammunition that is suitable for use only in a handgun.

(2) It shall be unlawful for any person who is a juvenile to knowingly possess –

(A) A handgun; or

(B) Ammunition that is suitable for use only in a handgun.

18 United States Code § 924 Firearms and Ammunition -- Forfeiture and Unlawful Acts

(d) [Firearms used or possessed in connection with many of the above offenses are subject to seizure and forfeiture]

(l) [it is unlawful for any person to] steal any firearm [that was made or shipped from outside the state]

18 United States Code § 1038 -- False Information and Hoaxes

(a)(1) Whoever engages in any conduct with intent to convey false or misleading information under circumstances where such information may reasonably be believed and where such information indicates that an activity has taken, is taking, or will take place that would constitute a violation of chapter 2 (Aircraft & Motor Vehicles), 10 (Biological Weapons), 11B (Chemical Weapons), 39 (Explosives and Other Dangerous Weapons), 40 (Importation, Manufacture, Distribution and Storage of Explosive Material), 44 (Firearms), 111 (Shipping), or 113B (Terrorism) of this title... , shall –

(b) Civil Action. Whoever engages in any conduct with intent to convey false or misleading information under circumstances where such information may reasonably be believed and where such information indicates that an activity has taken, is taking, or will take place that would constitute a violation of chapter 2

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(Aircraft & Motor Vehicles), 10 (Biological Weapons), 11B (Chemical Weapons), 39 (Explosives and Other Dangerous Weapons), 40 (Importation, Manufacture, Distribution and Storage of Explosive Material), 44 (Firearms), 111 (Shipping), or 113B (Terrorism) of this title...is liable in a civil action to any party incurring expenses incident to any emergency or investigative response to that conduct, for those expenses.

[DOJ notification]

18 United States Code § 1463 -- Mailing Indecent Matter on Wrappers or Envelopes

Whoever knowingly deposits for mailing or delivery, [any] envelope or outside cover or wrapper of which, [or any] postal cards upon which, any delineations, epithets, terms, or language of an indecent, lewd, lascivious, or obscene character are written or printed or otherwise impressed or apparent.

18 United States Code § 2332f -- Bombings of Places of Public Use (Including Schools)

Whoever unlawfully delivers, places, discharges, or detonates an explosive or other lethal device in, into, or against a place of public use [or attempts or conspires to do so] . . . —

(A) with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or

(B) with the intent to cause extensive destruction of such a place, facility, or system, where such destruction results in or is likely to result in major economic loss

[DOJ notification]

26 United States Code § 5841 -- Making Firearms or Destructive Devices

Prohibits the making of a firearm or destructive device (e.g. explosive or incendiary device, bomb, or grenade) without registering the item

26 United States Code § 5861 -- Receipt or Possession of Certain Firearms or Destructive Devices

Prohibits the receipt or possession of an unregistered firearm or destructive device or such firearm or device made in violation of law

47 United States Code § 223 -- Obscene or Harassing Telecommunications

Prohibits using a telecommunications device [includes a phone as well as any device or software that can be used to originate telecommunications or other types of communications that are transmitted, in whole or in part, by the internet] to:

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- (A) Make, create, solicit, and initiate the transmission of any comment, request, suggestion, proposal, image, or other communication which is obscene or child pornography, with intent to abuse, threaten, or harass another person;
- (B) Make, create, solicit, and initiate the transmission of any comment, request, suggestion, proposal, image, or other communication which is obscene or child pornography, knowing that the recipient of the communication is under 18 years of age, regardless of whether the maker of such communication placed the call or initiated the communication;
- (C) Make a telephone call or utilizes a telecommunications device, whether or not conversation or communication ensues, without disclosing his identity and with intent to abuse, threaten, or harass any specific person;
- (D) Makes or causes the telephone of another repeatedly or continuously to ring, with intent to harass any person at the called number; or
- (E) Makes repeated telephone calls or repeatedly initiates communication with a telecommunications device, during which conversation or communication ensues, solely to harass any specific person.

**School Threats Prevention Resource Guide:
A Shared Responsibility**

**State of Virginia Potential Charges Applicable To Situations
Involving
Threats of Targeted Attacks**

The following are charges that may apply to situation involving *threats* of targeted attacks, conveyed in person, by telephone, in writing, by electronic means, through social media, or any other manner of communications to others. In the event a suspect were to act upon the threat to otherwise attempt to actually carry out the threat, a myriad of other charges will apply. Which of the charges listed below will be the most appropriate and provable charge, will depend on the facts and circumstances of each situation. If more than one person is involved in making the threat, a charge of Conspiracy may also be appropriate.

A. Virginia code § 18.2- 57. Assault and Battery- Penalty

- a. Any person who commits a simple assault and battery is guilty of a class 1 misdemeanor and if the person intentionally selects the person against whom a simple assault is committed because of his race, religious conviction, color or national origin, the penalty upon convictions shall include a term of confinement of at least six months, 30 days of which shall be a mandatory minimum term of confinement.
- b. However if a person intentionally selects the person against whom an assault and battery resulting in bodily injury is committed because of his race, religious conviction, color or national origin, the person is guilty if a class 6 felony, and the penalty upon conviction shall include a term of confinement of at least six months, 30 day of which shall be a mandatory minimum term of confinement.
- c. In addition, if any person commits an assault and battery against another knowing or having reason to know that such other person is a judge, a magistrate, a law-enforcement officer as defined in subsection F, a correctional officer as defined in § 53.1-1, a person directly involved in the care, treatment, or supervision of inmates in the custody if the Department of Corrections or an employee of a local or regional correctional facility directly involved in the care, treatment or supervision of inmates in the custody of the facility, a person directly involved in the care, treatment or supervision of persons in the custody of or under the supervision of the Department of juvenile justice, an employee or other individual who provides control, care, or treatment of sexually violent predators committed to the custody of the Department of Behavioral Health and Development Services, A firefighter as defined in § 65.2-102, or a volunteer firefighter or any medical services agency or as a member of a bona fide volunteer fire department or volunteer emergency

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medical services agency, regardless of whether a resolution has been adopted by the governing body of a political subdivision recognizing such firefighters or emergency medical services personnel as employees, engaged in the performance of his public duties anywhere in the Commonwealth, such person is guilty of a class 6 felony, and, upon conviction, the sentence of such person shall include a mandatory minimum term of confinement of six months.

- d. In addition, if any person commits a battery against another knowing or having reason to know that such other person is a full-time or part-time employee of any public or private elementary or secondary school and is engaged in the performance of his duties as such, he is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor and the sentence of such person upon conviction shall include a sentence of 15 days in jail, two days of which shall be a mandatory minimum term of confinement. However, if the offense is committed by use of a firearm or other weapon prohibited on school property pursuant to § 18.2-308.1, the person shall serve a mandatory minimum sentence of confinement of six months.

B. Virginia code § 18.2-60. Threats of death or bodily injury to a person or member of his family; threats to commit serious bodily harm to persons on school property; Penalty.

- a. 1. Any person who knowingly communicates, in a writing, including an electronically transmitted communication producing a visual or electronic message, a threat to kill or do bodily injury to a person, regarding that person or any member of his family, and the threat places such person in reasonable apprehension of death or bodily injury to himself or his family member, is guilty of a Class 6 felony. However, any person who violates this subsection with the intent to commit an act of terrorism as defined in § [18.2-46.4](#) is guilty of a Class 5 felony.
- b. 2. Any person who communicates a threat, in a writing, including an electronically transmitted communication producing a visual or electronic message, to kill or do bodily harm, (i) on the grounds or premises of any elementary, middle or secondary school property, (ii) at any elementary, middle or secondary school-sponsored event or (iii) on a school bus to any person or persons, regardless of whether the person who is the object of the threat actually receives the threat, and the threat would place the person who is the object of the threat in reasonable apprehension of death or bodily harm, is guilty of a Class 6 felony.
- c. Any person who orally makes a threat to any employee of any elementary, middle or secondary school, while on a school bus, on school property or at a school-sponsored activity, to kill or to do bodily injury to such person, is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

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C. Virginia code § 18.2-51: Shooting, Stabbing, etc., with intent to maim, kill, etc.

- a. If any person maliciously shoot, stab, cut, or wound any person or by any means cause him bodily injury, with the intent to maim, disfigure, disable, or kill, he shall, except where it is otherwise provided, be guilty of a Class 3 felony. If such act be done unlawfully but not maliciously, with the intent aforesaid, the offender shall be guilty of a Class 6 felony.

D. Virginia code § 18.2-152.7-1: Harassment by computer; penalty.

- b. If any person, with the intent to coerce, intimidate, or harass any person, shall use a computer or computer network to communicate obscene, vulgar, profane, lewd, lascivious, or indecent language, or make any suggestion or proposal of an obscene nature, or threaten any illegal or immoral act, he shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor.

E. Virginia code § 18.2-85: Manufacture, possession, us, etc., of firebombs or explosive materials or devices; penalties:

- c. For the purpose of this section:
 - i. "Device" means any instrument, apparatus or contrivance, including its component parts, that is capable of producing or intended to produce an explosion but shall not include fireworks as defined in § [27-95](#).
 - ii. "Explosive material" means any chemical compound, mechanical mixture or device that is commonly used or can be used for the purpose of producing an explosion and which contains any oxidizing and combustive agents or other ingredients in such proportions, quantities or packaging that an ignition by fire, friction, concussion, percussion, detonation or by any part of the compound or mixture may cause a sudden generation of highly heated gases. These materials include, but are not limited to, gunpowder, powders for blasting, high explosives, blasting materials, fuses,(other than electric circuit breakers, detonators, and other detonating agents and smokeless power.
 - iii. "Fire bomb" means any container of a flammable material such as gasoline, kerosene, fuel oil, nor other chemical compound, having a wick composed of any material or a device or other substance which, if set or ignited, is capable of igniting such flammable material or chemical compound but does not include a similar device commercially.
 - iv. "Hoax explosive device" means any device which by design, construction, content or characteristics appears to be or to contain a bomb or other destructive device or explosive but which is an imitation of any such device or explosive

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- v. Any person who (i) possesses materials with which fire bombs or explosive materials or devices can be made with the intent to manufacture fire bombs or explosive materials or devices or, (ii) manufactures, transports, distributes, possesses or uses a fire bomb or explosive materials shall be guilty of a Class 5 felony. Any person who constructs, uses, places, sends, or causes to be sent any hoax explosive device so as to intentionally cause another person to believe that such device is a bomb or explosive shall be guilty of a Class 6 felony.
- vi. Nothing in this section shall prohibit the authorized manufacture, transportation, distribution, use or possession of any material, substance or device by a member of the armed forces of the United States, fire fighters or law-enforcement officers or possession of any material, substance or device to be used solely for scientific research, educational purposes or for any lawful purpose subject to the provisions of § [27-97](#) and § [27-97.2](#).

F. Virginia code § 18.2-46.5. Committing, conspiring and aiding and abetting acts of terrorism prohibited; penalty.

- a. A. Any person who commits or conspires to commit, or aids and abets the commission of an act of terrorism, as defined in § [18.2-46.4](#), is guilty of a Class 2 felony if the base offense of such act of terrorism may be punished by life imprisonment, or a term of imprisonment of not less than twenty years
- b. B. Any person who commits, conspires to commit or aids and abets the commission of an act of terrorism, as defined in in § [18.2-46.4](#), is guilty of a Class 3 felony if the maximum penalty for the base offense of such act of terrorism is a term of imprisonment or incarceration in jail of less than twenty years.
- c. C. Any person who solicits, invites, recruits, encourages, or otherwise causes or attempts to cause another to participate in an act or acts of terrorism, as defined in § [18.2-46.4](#), is guilty of a Class 4 felony.
- d. D. Any person who knowingly provides any material support (i) to an individual or organization whose primary objective is to commit an act of terrorism and (ii) does so with the intent to further such individual's or organization's objective is guilty of a Class 3 felony. If the death of any person results from providing any material support, then the person who provided such material support is guilty of a Class 2 felony.

G. Virginia code § 18.2-46.6. Possession, manufacture, distribution, etc. of terrorism or hoax device prohibited; penalty.

- a. Any person who, with the intent to commit an act of terrorism, possesses, uses, sells, gives, distributes or manufactures (i) a weapon of terrorism or (ii) a "fire

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bomb," "explosive material," or "device," as those terms are defined in § [18.2-85](#), is guilty of a Class 2 felony.

- b. Any person who, with the intent to commit an act of terrorism, possesses, uses, sells, gives, distributes or manufactures any device or material that by its design, construction, content or characteristics appears to be or appears to contain a (i) weapon of terrorism or (ii) a "fire bomb," "explosive material," or "device," as those terms are defined in § [18.2-85](#), but that is an imitation of any such weapon of terrorism, "fire bomb," "explosive material," or "device" is guilty of a Class 3 felony.
- c. Any person who, with the intent to (i) intimidate the civilian population, (ii) influence the conduct or activities of the government of the United States, a state or locality through intimidation, (iii) compel the emergency evacuation of any place of assembly, building or other structure or any means of mass transportation, or (iv) place any person in reasonable apprehension of bodily harm, uses, sells, gives, distributes or manufactures any device or material that by its design, construction, content or characteristics appears to be or appears to contain a weapon of terrorism, but that is an imitation of any such weapon of terrorism is guilty of a Class 6 felony.

H. Virginia code § 18.2-46.4. Definitions.

- a. As used in this article, unless the context requires otherwise or it is otherwise provided:
 - i. "Act of terrorism" means an act of violence as defined in clause (i) of subdivision A of § [19.2-297.1](#) or an act that would be an act of violence if committed within the Commonwealth committed within or outside the Commonwealth with the intent to (i) intimidate a civilian population at large or (ii) influence the conduct or activities of a government, including the government of the United States, a state, or a locality, through intimidation.
 - ii. "Base offense" means an act of violence as defined in clause (i) of subdivision A of § [19.2-297.1](#) committed with the intent required to commit an act of terrorism.
 - iii. "Weapon of terrorism" means any device or material that is designed, intended or used to cause death, bodily injury or serious bodily harm, through the release, dissemination, or impact of (i) poisonous chemicals; (ii) an infectious biological substance; or (iii) release of radiation or radioactivity.

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I. Virginia code § 18.2-22. Conspiracy to Commit Felony

- a. If any person shall conspire, confederate or combine with another, either within or without this Commonwealth, to commit a felony within this Commonwealth, or if he shall so conspire, confederate or combine with another within this Commonwealth to commit a felony either within or without this Commonwealth, he shall be guilty of a felony which shall be punishable as follows:
 - i. Every person who so conspires to commit an offense which is punishable by death shall be guilty of a Class 3 felony;
 - ii. Every person who so conspires to commit an offense which is a noncapital felony shall be guilty of a Class 5 felony; and
 - i. Every person who so conspires to commit an offense the maximum punishment for which is confinement in a state correctional facility for a period of less than five years shall be confined in a state correctional facility for a period of one year, or, in the discretion of the jury or the court trying the case without a jury, may be confined in jail not exceeding twelve months and fined not exceeding \$500, either or both.
- b. However, in no event shall the punishment for a conspiracy to commit an offense exceed the maximum punishment for the commission of the offense itself.
- c. Jurisdiction for the trial of any person accused of a conspiracy under this section shall be in the county or city wherein any part of such conspiracy is planned or in the county or city wherein any act is done toward the consummation of such plan or conspiracy.
- d. The penalty provisions of this section shall not apply to any person who conspires to commit any offense defined in Chapter 34 of Title 54.1 or of Article 1 (§ [18.2-247](#) et seq.), Chapter 7 of this title. The penalty for any such violation shall be as provided in § [18.2-256](#).

J. Virginia code § 18.2-308.1. Possession of firearm, stun weapon, or other weapon on school property prohibited; penalty.

- a. If any person knowingly possesses any (i) stun weapon as defined in this section;(ii) Knife, except a pocket knife having a folding metal blade of less than three inches; or (iii) weapon, including a weapon of like kind, designated in subsection A of §18.2-308, other than a firearm; upon (a) the property of any public, private or religious elementary, middle or high school, including buildings and grounds; (b) that portion of any property open to the public and then exclusively used for school-sponsored functions or extracurricular activities while such functions or activities are taking place; or (c) any such school, he is guilty of a class 1 misdemeanor.

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- b. If any person knowingly possesses any firearm designed or intended to expel a projectile by action of an explosion of a combustible material while such person is upon (i) any public, private or religious elementary, middle or high school, including buildings and grounds; (ii) that portion of any property open to the public and then exclusively used for school-sponsored function or extracurricular activities while such function or activities are taking place; or (iii) any school bus owned or operated by any such school, he is guilty of a class 6 felony.
- c. If any person knowingly possesses any firearm designed or intended to expel a projectile by action of an explosion of a combustible material within a public, private or religious elementary, middle or high school building and intends to use, or attempts to use, such firearm, or displays such weapon in a threatening manner, such person is guilty of a Class 6 felony and sentenced to a mandatory minimum term of imprisonment of five years to be served consecutively with any other sentence.

The exemptions set out in §§ [18.2-308](#) and [18.2-308.016](#) shall apply, mutatis mutandis, to the provisions of this section. The provisions of this section shall not apply to (i) persons who possess such weapon or weapons as a part of the school's curriculum or activities; (ii) a person possessing a knife customarily used for food preparation or service and using it for such purpose; (iii) persons who possess such weapon or weapons as a part of any program sponsored or facilitated by either the school or any organization authorized by the school to conduct its programs either on or off the school premises; (iv) any law-enforcement officer, or retired law-enforcement officer qualified pursuant to subsection C of § [18.2-308.016](#); (v) any person who possesses a knife or blade which he uses customarily in his trade; (vi) a person who possesses an unloaded firearm that is in a closed container, or a knife having a metal blade, in or upon a motor vehicle, or an unloaded shotgun or rifle in a firearms rack in or upon a motor vehicle; (vii) a person who has a valid concealed handgun permit and possesses a concealed handgun while in a motor vehicle in a parking lot, traffic circle, or other means of vehicular ingress or egress to the school; (viii) a school security officer authorized to carry a firearm pursuant to § [22.1-280.2:1](#); or (ix) an armed security officer, licensed pursuant to Article 4 (§ [9.1-138](#) et seq.) of Chapter 1 of Title 9.1, hired by a private or religious school for the protection of students and employees as authorized by such school. For the purposes of this paragraph, "weapon" includes a knife having a metal blade of three inches or longer and "closed container" includes a locked vehicle trunk.

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**Virginia Code Chapter 8: Behavioral Health and
Developmental services**

A. Virginia code § 37.2-804.2. Disclosure of Records

- a. Any health care provider, as defined in § [32.1-127.1:03](#), or other provider who has provided or is currently providing services to a person who is the subject of proceedings pursuant to this chapter shall, upon request, disclose to a magistrate, the court, the person's attorney, the person's guardian ad litem, the examiner identified to perform an examination pursuant to § [37.2-815](#), the community services board or its designee performing any evaluation, preadmission screening, or monitoring duties pursuant to this chapter, or a law-enforcement officer any information that is necessary and appropriate for the performance of his duties pursuant to this chapter. Any health care provider, as defined in § [32.1-127.1:03](#), or other provider who has provided or is currently evaluating or providing services to a person who is the subject of proceedings pursuant to this chapter shall disclose information that may be necessary for the treatment of such person to any other health care provider or other provider evaluating or providing services to or monitoring the treatment of the person. Health records disclosed to a law-enforcement officer shall be limited to information necessary to protect the officer, the person, or the public from physical injury or to address the health care needs of the person. Information disclosed to a law-enforcement officer shall not be used for any other purpose, disclosed to others, or retained.

Any health care provider providing services to a person who is the subject of proceedings under this chapter shall (i) inform the person that his family member or personal representative, including any agent named in an advance directive executed in accordance with the Health Care Decisions Act (§ [54.1-2981](#) et seq.), will be notified of information that is directly relevant to such individual's involvement with the person's health care, which may include the person's location and general condition, in accordance with subdivision D 34 of § [32.1-127.1:03](#), and (ii) make a reasonable effort to so notify the person's family member or personal representative, unless the provider has actual knowledge that the family member or personal representative is currently prohibited by court order from contacting the person. No health care provider shall be required to notify a person's family member or personal representative pursuant to this section if the health care provider has actual knowledge that such notice has been provided.

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Any health care provider disclosing records pursuant to this section shall be immune from civil liability for any harm resulting from the disclosure, including any liability under the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (42 U.S.C. § 1320d et seq.), as amended, unless the person or provider disclosing such records intended the harm or acted in bad faith.

B. Virginia code § 32.7-808. Emergency custody; issuance and execution of order.

- a. Any magistrate shall issue, upon the sworn petition of any responsible person, treating physician, or upon his own motion, an emergency custody order when he has probable cause to believe that any person (i) has a mental illness and that there exists a substantial likelihood that, as a result of mental illness, the person will, in the near future, (a) cause serious physical harm to himself or others as evidenced by recent behavior causing, attempting, or threatening harm and other relevant information, if any, or (b) suffer serious harm due to his lack of capacity to protect himself from harm or to provide for his basic human needs, (ii) is in need of hospitalization or treatment, and (iii) is unwilling to volunteer or incapable of volunteering for hospitalization or treatment. Any emergency custody order entered pursuant to this section shall provide for the disclosure of medical records pursuant to § [37.2-804.2](#). This subsection shall not preclude any other disclosures as required or permitted by law.
 - i. When considering whether there is probable cause to issue an emergency custody order, the magistrate may, in addition to the petition, consider (1) the recommendations of any treating or examining physician or psychologist licensed in Virginia, if available, (2) any past actions of the person, (3) any past mental health treatment of the person, (4) any relevant hearsay evidence, (5) any medical records available, (6) any affidavits submitted, if the witness is unavailable and it so states in the affidavit, and (7) any other information available that the magistrate considers relevant to the determination of whether probable cause exists to issue an emergency custody order.
- b. Any person for whom an emergency custody order is issued shall be taken into custody and transported to a convenient location to be evaluated to determine whether the person meets the criteria for temporary detention pursuant to § [37.2-809](#) and to assess the need for hospitalization or treatment. The evaluation shall be made by a person designated by the community services board who is skilled in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness and who has completed a certification program approved by the Department.
- c. The magistrate issuing an emergency custody order shall specify the primary law-

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enforcement agency and jurisdiction to execute the emergency custody order and provide transportation. However, the magistrate shall consider any request to authorize transportation by an alternative transportation provider in accordance with this section, whenever an alternative transportation provider is identified to the magistrate, which may be a person, facility, or agency, including a family member or friend of the person who is the subject of the order, a representative of the community services board, or other transportation provider with personnel trained to provide transportation in a safe manner, upon determining, following consideration of information provided by the petitioner; the community services board or its designee; the local law-enforcement agency, if any; the person's treating physician, if any; or other persons who are available and have knowledge of the person, and, when the magistrate deems appropriate, the proposed alternative transportation provider, either in person or via two-way electronic video and audio or telephone communication system, that the proposed alternative transportation provider is available to provide transportation, willing to provide transportation, and able to provide transportation in a safe manner. When transportation is ordered to be provided by an alternative transportation provider, the magistrate shall order the specified primary law-enforcement agency to execute the order, to take the person into custody, and to transfer custody of the person to the alternative transportation provider identified in the order. In such cases, a copy of the emergency custody order shall accompany the person being transported pursuant to this section at all times and shall be delivered by the alternative transportation provider to the community services board or its designee responsible for conducting the evaluation. The community services board or its designee conducting the evaluation shall return a copy of the emergency custody order to the court designated by the magistrate as soon as is practicable. Delivery of an order to a law-enforcement officer or alternative transportation provider and return of an order to the court may be accomplished electronically or by facsimile.

- i. Transportation under this section shall include transportation to a medical facility as may be necessary to obtain emergency medical evaluation or treatment that shall be conducted immediately in accordance with state and federal law. Transportation under this section shall include transportation to a medical facility for a medical evaluation if a physician at the hospital in which the person subject to the emergency custody order may be detained requires a medical evaluation prior to admission.
- d. In specifying the primary law-enforcement agency and jurisdiction for purposes of

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this section, the magistrate shall order the primary law-enforcement agency from the jurisdiction served by the community services board that designated the person to perform the evaluation required in subsection B to execute the order and, in cases in which transportation is ordered to be provided by the primary law-enforcement agency, provide transportation. If the community services board serves more than one jurisdiction, the magistrate shall designate the primary law-enforcement agency from the particular jurisdiction within the community services board's service area where the person who is the subject of the emergency custody order was taken into custody or, if the person has not yet been taken into custody, the primary law-enforcement agency from the jurisdiction where the person is presently located to execute the order and provide transportation.

- e. The law-enforcement agency or alternative transportation provider providing transportation pursuant to this section may transfer custody of the person to the facility or location to which the person is transported for the evaluation required in subsection B, G, or H if the facility or location (i) is licensed to provide the level of security necessary to protect both the person and others from harm, (ii) is actually capable of providing the level of security necessary to protect the person and others from harm, and (iii) in cases in which transportation is provided by a law-enforcement agency, has entered into an agreement or memorandum of understanding with the law-enforcement agency setting forth the terms and conditions under which it will accept a transfer of custody, provided, however, that the facility or location may not require the law-enforcement agency to pay any fees or costs for the transfer of custody.
- f. A law-enforcement officer may lawfully go or be sent beyond the territorial limits of the county, city, or town in which he serves to any point in the Commonwealth for the purpose of executing an emergency custody order pursuant to this section.
- g. A law-enforcement officer who, based upon his observation or the reliable reports of others, has probable cause to believe that a person meets the criteria for emergency custody as stated in this section may take that person into custody and transport that person to an appropriate location to assess the need for hospitalization or treatment without prior authorization. A law-enforcement officer who takes a person into custody pursuant to this subsection or subsection H may lawfully go or be sent beyond the territorial limits of the county, city, or town in which he serves to any point in the Commonwealth for the purpose of obtaining the assessment. Such evaluation shall be conducted immediately. The period of custody shall not exceed eight hours from the time the law-enforcement officer takes the person into custody.

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- h. A law-enforcement officer who is transporting a person who has voluntarily consented to be transported to a facility for the purpose of assessment or evaluation and who is beyond the territorial limits of the county, city, or town in which he serves may take such person into custody and transport him to an appropriate location to assess the need for hospitalization or treatment without prior authorization when the law-enforcement officer determines (i) that the person has revoked consent to be transported to a facility for the purpose of assessment or evaluation, and (ii) based upon his observations, that probable cause exists to believe that the person meets the criteria for emergency custody as stated in this section. The period of custody shall not exceed eight hours from the time the law-enforcement officer takes the person into custody.
- i. Nothing herein shall preclude a law-enforcement officer or alternative transportation provider from obtaining emergency medical treatment or further medical evaluation at any time for a person in his custody as provided in this section.
- j. A representative of the primary law-enforcement agency specified to execute an emergency custody order or a representative of the law-enforcement agency employing a law-enforcement officer who takes a person into custody pursuant to subsection G or H shall notify the community services board responsible for conducting the evaluation required in subsection B, G, or H as soon as practicable after execution of the emergency custody order or after the person has been taken into custody pursuant to subsection G or H.
- k. The person shall remain in custody until a temporary detention order is issued, until the person is released, or until the emergency custody order expires. An emergency custody order shall be valid for a period not to exceed eight hours from the time of execution.
- l. Nothing in this section shall preclude the issuance of an order for temporary detention for testing, observation, or treatment pursuant to § [37.2-1104](#) for a person who is also the subject of an emergency custody order issued pursuant to this section. In any case in which an order for temporary detention for testing, observation, or treatment is issued for a person who is also the subject of an emergency custody order, the person may be detained by a hospital emergency room or other appropriate facility for testing, observation, and treatment for a period not to exceed 24 hours, unless extended by the court as part of an order pursuant to § [37.2-1101](#), in accordance with subsection A of § [37.2-1104](#). Upon completion of testing, observation, or treatment pursuant to § [37.2-1104](#), the hospital emergency room or other appropriate facility in which the person is detained shall notify the nearest community services board,

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- m. and the designee of the community services board shall, as soon as is practicable and prior to the expiration of the order for temporary detention issued pursuant to § [37.2-1104](#), conduct an evaluation of the person to determine if he meets the criteria for temporary detention pursuant to § [37.2-809](#).
 - n. Any person taken into emergency custody pursuant to this section shall be given a written summary of the emergency custody procedures and the statutory protections associated with those procedures.
 - o. If an emergency custody order is not executed within eight hours of its issuance, the order shall be void and shall be returned unexecuted to the office of the clerk of the issuing court or, if such office is not open, to any magistrate serving the jurisdiction of the issuing court.
 - p. In addition to the eight-hour period of emergency custody set forth in subsection G, H, or K, if the individual is detained in a state facility pursuant to subsection E of § [37.2-809](#), the state facility and an employee or designee of the community services board as defined in § [37.2-809](#) may, for an additional four hours, continue to attempt to identify an alternative facility that is able and willing to provide temporary detention and appropriate care to the individual.
 - q. Payments shall be made pursuant to § [37.2-804](#) to licensed health care providers for medical screening and assessment services provided to persons with mental illnesses while in emergency custody.
 - r. No person who provides alternative transportation pursuant to this section shall be liable to the person being transported for any civil damages for ordinary negligence in acts or omissions that result from providing such alternative transportation.
- C. Virginia code § 32.7-809. Involuntary temporary detention; issuance and execution of order.**
- a. For the purposes of this section:
 - i. "Designee of the local community services board" means an examiner designated by the local community services board who (i) is skilled in the assessment and treatment of mental illness, (ii) has completed a certification program approved by the Department, (iii) is able to provide an independent examination of the person, (iv) is not related by blood or marriage to the person being evaluated, (v) has no financial interest in the admission or treatment of the person being evaluated, (vi) has no investment interest in the facility detaining or admitting the person under this article, and (vii) except for employees of state hospitals and of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, is not employed by the facility.
 - ii. "Employee" means an employee of the local community services board who

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is skilled in the assessment and treatment of mental illness and has completed a certification program approved by the Department.

- iii. "Investment interest" means the ownership or holding of an equity or debt security, including shares of stock in a corporation, interests or units of a partnership, bonds, debentures, notes, or other equity or debt instruments.

- b. A magistrate shall issue, upon the sworn petition of any responsible person, treating physician, or upon his own motion and only after an evaluation conducted in-person or by means of a two-way electronic video and audio communication system as authorized in § [37.2-804.1](#) by an employee or a designee of the local community services board to determine whether the person meets the criteria for temporary detention, a temporary detention order if it appears from all evidence readily available, including any recommendation from a physician or clinical psychologist treating the person, that the person (i) has a mental illness and that there exists a substantial likelihood that, as a result of mental illness, the person will, in the near future, (a) cause serious physical harm to himself or others as evidenced by recent behavior causing, attempting, or threatening harm and other relevant information, if any, or (b) suffer serious harm due to his lack of capacity to protect himself from harm or to provide for his basic human needs; (ii) is in need of hospitalization or treatment; and (iii) is unwilling to volunteer or incapable of volunteering for hospitalization or treatment. The magistrate shall also consider, if available, (a) information provided by the person who initiated emergency custody and (b) the recommendations of any treating or examining physician licensed in Virginia either verbally or in writing prior to rendering a decision. Any temporary detention order entered pursuant to this section shall provide for the disclosure of medical records pursuant to § [37.2-804.2](#). This subsection shall not preclude any other disclosures as required or permitted by law.

- c. When considering whether there is probable cause to issue a temporary detention order, the magistrate may, in addition to the petition, consider (i) the recommendations of any treating or examining physician or psychologist licensed in Virginia, if available, (ii) any past actions of the person, (iii) any past mental health treatment of the person, (iv) any relevant hearsay evidence, (v) any medical records available, (vi) any affidavits submitted, if the witness is unavailable and it so states in the affidavit, and (vii) any other information available that the magistrate considers relevant to the determination of whether probable cause exists to issue a temporary detention order.

- d. A magistrate may issue a temporary detention order without an emergency custody order proceeding. A magistrate may issue a temporary detention order

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without a prior evaluation pursuant to subsection B if (i) the person has been personally examined within the previous 72 hours by an employee or a designee of the local community services board or (ii) there is a significant physical, psychological, or medical risk to the person or to others associated with conducting such evaluation.

- e. An employee or a designee of the local community services board shall determine the facility of temporary detention in accordance with the provisions of § [37.2-809.1](#) for all individuals detained pursuant to this section. An employee or designee of the local community services board may change the facility of temporary detention and may designate an alternative facility for temporary detention at any point during the period of temporary detention if it is determined that the alternative facility is a more appropriate facility for temporary detention of the individual given the specific security, medical, or behavioral health needs of the person. In cases in which the facility of temporary detention is changed following transfer of custody to an initial facility of temporary custody, transportation of the individual to the alternative facility of temporary detention shall be provided in accordance with the provisions of § [37.2-810](#). The initial facility of temporary detention shall be identified on the preadmission screening report and indicated on the temporary detention order; however, if an employee or designee of the local community services board designates an alternative facility, that employee or designee shall provide written notice forthwith, on a form developed by the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia, to the clerk of the issuing court of the name and address of the alternative facility. Subject to the provisions of § [37.2-809.1](#), if a facility of temporary detention cannot be identified by the time of the expiration of the period of emergency custody pursuant to § [37.2-808](#), the individual shall be detained in a state facility for the treatment of individuals with mental illness and such facility shall be indicated on the temporary detention order. Except as provided in § [37.2-811](#) for inmates requiring hospitalization in accordance with subdivision A 2 of § [19.2-169.6](#), the person shall not be detained in a jail or other place of confinement for persons charged with criminal offenses and shall remain in the custody of law enforcement until the person is either detained within a secure facility or custody has been accepted by the appropriate personnel designated by either the initial facility of temporary detention identified in the temporary detention order or by the alternative facility of temporary detention designated by the employee or designee of the local community services board pursuant to this subsection. The person detained or in custody pursuant to

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this section shall be given a written summary of the temporary detention procedures and the statutory protections associated with those procedures.

- f. Any facility caring for a person placed with it pursuant to a temporary detention order is authorized to provide emergency medical and psychiatric services within its capabilities when the facility determines that the services are in the best interests of the person within its care. The costs incurred as a result of the hearings and by the facility in providing services during the period of temporary detention shall be paid and recovered pursuant to § [37.2-804](#). The maximum costs reimbursable by the Commonwealth pursuant to this section shall be established by the State Board of Medical Assistance Services based on reasonable criteria. The State Board of Medical Assistance Services shall, by regulation, establish a reasonable rate per day of inpatient care for temporary detention.
- g. The employee or the designee of the local community services board who is conducting the evaluation pursuant to this section shall determine, prior to the issuance of the temporary detention order, the insurance status of the person. Where coverage by a third party payer exists, the facility seeking reimbursement under this section shall first seek reimbursement from the third party payer. The Commonwealth shall reimburse the facility only for the balance of costs remaining after the allowances covered by the third party payer have been received.
- h. The duration of temporary detention shall be sufficient to allow for completion of the examination required by § [37.2-815](#), preparation of the preadmission screening report required by § [37.2-816](#), and initiation of mental health treatment to stabilize the person's psychiatric condition to avoid involuntary commitment where possible, but shall not exceed 72 hours prior to a hearing. If the 72-hour period herein specified terminates on a Saturday, Sunday, legal holiday, or day on which the court is lawfully closed, the person may be detained, as herein provided, until the close of business on the next day that is not a Saturday, Sunday, legal holiday, or day on which the court is lawfully closed. The person may be released, pursuant to § [37.2-813](#), before the 72-hour period herein specified has run.
- i. If a temporary detention order is not executed within 24 hours of its issuance, or within a shorter period as is specified in the order, the order shall be void and shall be returned unexecuted to the office of the clerk of the issuing court or, if the office is not open, to any magistrate serving the jurisdiction of the issuing court. Subsequent orders may be issued upon the original petition within 96 hours after the petition is filed. However, a magistrate must again obtain the advice of an employee or a designee of the local community services board prior to issuing a subsequent order upon the original petition.

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Any petition for which no temporary detention order or other process in connection therewith is served on the subject of the petition within 96 hours after the petition is filed shall be void and shall be returned to the office of the clerk of the issuing court.

- j. The Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia shall establish and require that a magistrate, as provided by this section, be available seven days a week, 24 hours a day, for the purpose of performing the duties established by this section. Each community services board shall provide to each general district court and magistrate's office within its service area a list of its employees and designees who are available to perform the evaluations required herein.
- k. For purposes of this section, a health care provider or designee of a local community services board or behavioral health authority shall not be required to encrypt any email containing information or medical records provided to a magistrate unless there is reason to believe that a third party will attempt to intercept the email.
- l. If the employee or designee of the community services board who is conducting the evaluation pursuant to this section recommends that the person should not be subject to a temporary detention order, such employee or designee shall (i) inform the petitioner, the person who initiated emergency custody if such person is present, and an onsite treating physician of his recommendation; (ii) promptly inform such person who initiated emergency custody that the community services board will facilitate communication between the person and the magistrate if the person disagrees with recommendations of the employee or designee of the community services board who conducted the evaluation and the person who initiated emergency custody so requests; and (iii) upon prompt request made by the person who initiated emergency custody, arrange for such person who initiated emergency custody to communicate with the magistrate as soon as is practicable and prior to the expiration of the period of emergency custody. The magistrate shall consider any information provided by the person who initiated emergency custody and any recommendations of the treating or examining physician and the employee or designee of the community services board who conducted the evaluation and consider such information and recommendations in accordance with subsection B in making his determination to issue a temporary detention order. The individual who is the subject of emergency custody shall remain in the custody of law enforcement or a designee of law enforcement and shall not be released from emergency custody until communication with the magistrate pursuant to this subsection has concluded and the magistrate has made

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a determination regarding issuance of a temporary detention order.

- m. For purposes of this section, "person who initiated emergency custody" means any person who initiated the issuance of an emergency custody order pursuant to § [37.2-808](#) or a law-enforcement officer who takes a person into custody pursuant to subsection G of § [37.2-808](#).

D. Virginia code § 37.2-817. Involuntary admission and mandatory outpatient treatment order.

- a. The district court judge or special justice shall render a decision on the petition for involuntary admission after the appointed examiner has presented the report required by § [37.2-815](#), and after the community services board that serves the county or city where the person resides or, if impractical, where the person is located has presented a preadmission screening report with recommendations for that person's placement, care, and treatment pursuant to § [37.2-816](#). These reports, if not contested, may constitute sufficient evidence upon which the district court judge or special justice may base his decision. The examiner, if not physically present at the hearing, and the treating physician at the facility of temporary detention shall be available whenever possible for questioning during the hearing through a two-way electronic video and audio or telephonic communication system as authorized in § [37.2-804.1](#).
- b. Any employee or designee of the local community services board, as defined in § [37.2-809](#), representing the community services board that prepared the preadmission screening report shall attend the hearing in person or, if physical attendance is not practicable, shall participate in the hearing through a two-way electronic video and audio or telephonic communication system as authorized in § [37.2-804.1](#). Where a hearing is held outside of the service area of the community services board that prepared the preadmission screening report, and it is not practicable for a representative of the board to attend or participate in the hearing, arrangements shall be made by the board for an employee or designee of the board serving the area in which the hearing is held to attend or participate on behalf of the board that prepared the preadmission screening report. The employee or designee of the local community services board, as defined in § [37.2-809](#), representing the community services board that prepared the preadmission screening report or attending or participating on behalf of the board that prepared the preadmission screening report shall not be excluded from the hearing pursuant to an order of sequestration of witnesses. The community services board that prepared the preadmission screening report shall remain responsible for the person subject to the hearing and, prior to the hearing, shall send the preadmission

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screening report through certified mail, personal delivery, facsimile with return receipt acknowledged, or other electronic means to the community services board attending the hearing. Where a community services board attends the hearing on behalf of the community services board that prepared the preadmission screening report, the attending community services board shall inform the community services board that prepared the preadmission screening report of the disposition of the matter upon the conclusion of the hearing. In addition, the attending community services board shall transmit the disposition through certified mail, personal delivery, facsimile with return receipt acknowledged, or other electronic means.

- i. At least 12 hours prior to the hearing, the court shall provide to the community services board that prepared the preadmission screening report the time and location of the hearing. If the representative of the community services board will be present by telephonic means, the court shall provide the telephone number to the board
- c. After observing the person and considering (i) the recommendations of any treating or examining physician or psychologist licensed in Virginia, if available, (ii) any past actions of the person, (iii) any past mental health treatment of the person, (iv) any examiner's certification, (v) any health records available, (vi) the preadmission screening report, and (vii) any other relevant evidence that may have been admitted, including whether the person recently has been found unrestorably incompetent to stand trial after a hearing held pursuant to subsection E of § [19.2-169.1](#), if the judge or special justice finds by clear and convincing evidence that (a) the person has a mental illness and there is a substantial likelihood that, as a result of mental illness, the person will, in the near future, (1) cause serious physical harm to himself or others as evidenced by recent behavior causing, attempting, or threatening harm and other relevant information, if any, or (2) suffer serious harm due to his lack of capacity to protect himself from harm or to provide for his basic human needs, and (b) all available less restrictive treatment alternatives to involuntary inpatient treatment, pursuant to subsection D, that would offer an opportunity for the improvement of the person's condition have been investigated and determined to be inappropriate, the judge or special justice shall by written order and specific findings so certify and order that the person be admitted involuntarily to a facility for a period of treatment not to exceed 30 days from the date of the court order. Such involuntary admission shall be to a facility designated by the community services board that serves the county or city in which the person was examined as provided in § [37.2-816](#). If the community services

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board does not designate a facility at the commitment hearing, the person shall be involuntarily admitted to a facility designated by the Commissioner. Upon the expiration of an order for involuntary admission, the person shall be released unless he is involuntarily admitted by further petition and order of a court, which shall be for a period not to exceed 180 days from the date of the subsequent court order, or such person makes application for treatment on a voluntary basis as provided for in § [37.2-805](#) or is ordered to mandatory outpatient treatment pursuant to subsection D. Upon motion of the treating physician, a family member or personal representative of the person, or the community services board serving the county or city where the facility is located, the county or city where the person resides, or the county or city where the person receives treatment, a hearing shall be held prior to the release date of any involuntarily admitted person to determine whether such person should be ordered to mandatory outpatient treatment pursuant to subsection D upon his release if such person, on at least two previous occasions within 36 months preceding the date of the hearing, has been (A) involuntarily admitted pursuant to this section or (B) the subject of a temporary detention order and voluntarily admitted himself in accordance with subsection B of § [37.2-814](#). A district court judge or special justice shall hold the hearing within 72 hours after receiving the motion for a mandatory outpatient treatment order; however, if the 72-hour period expires on a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday, the hearing shall be held by the close of business on the next day that is not a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday.

- i. In the order for involuntary admission, the judge or special justice may authorize the treating physician to discharge the person to mandatory outpatient treatment under a discharge plan developed pursuant to subsection C2, if the judge or special justice further finds by clear and convincing evidence that (i) the person has a history of lack of compliance with treatment for mental illness that at least twice within the past 36 months has resulted in the person being subject to an order for involuntary admission pursuant to subsection C; (ii) in view of the person's treatment history and current behavior, the person is in need of mandatory outpatient treatment following inpatient treatment in order to prevent a relapse or deterioration that would be likely to result in the person meeting the criteria for involuntary inpatient treatment; (iii) as a result of mental illness, the person is unlikely to voluntarily participate in outpatient treatment unless the court enters an order authorizing discharge to mandatory outpatient treatment following inpatient treatment; and (iv) the person is likely to benefit from mandatory outpatient treatment.

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The duration of mandatory outpatient treatment shall be determined by the court based on recommendations of the community services board, but shall not exceed 90 days. Upon expiration of the order for mandatory outpatient treatment, the person shall be released unless the order is continued in accordance with § [37.2-817.4](#).

- ii. Prior to discharging the person to mandatory outpatient treatment under a discharge plan as authorized pursuant to subsection C1, the treating physician shall determine, based upon his professional judgment, that (i) the person (a) in view of the person's treatment history and current behavior, no longer needs inpatient hospitalization, (b) requires mandatory outpatient treatment at the time of discharge to prevent relapse or deterioration of his condition that would likely result in his meeting the criteria for involuntary inpatient treatment, and (c) has agreed to abide by his discharge plan and has the ability to do so; and (ii) the ordered treatment will be delivered on an outpatient basis by the community services board or designated provider to the person. Prior to discharging a person to mandatory outpatient treatment under a discharge plan who has not executed an advance directive, the treating physician or his designee shall give to the person a written explanation of the procedures for executing an advance directive in accordance with the Health Care Decisions Act (§ [54.1-2981](#) et seq.) and an advance directive form, which may be the form set forth in § [54.1-2984](#). In no event shall the treating physician discharge a person to mandatory outpatient treatment under a discharge plan as authorized pursuant to subsection C1 if the person meets the criteria for involuntary commitment set forth in subsection C. The discharge plan developed by the treating physician and facility staff in conjunction with the community services board and the person shall serve as and shall contain all the components of the comprehensive mandatory outpatient treatment plan set forth in subsection G, and no initial mandatory outpatient treatment plan set forth in subsection F shall be required. The discharge plan shall be submitted to the court for approval and, upon approval by the court, shall be filed and incorporated into the order entered pursuant to subsection C1. The discharge plan shall be provided to the person by the community services board at the time of the person's discharge from the inpatient facility. The community services board where the person resides upon discharge shall monitor the person's compliance with the discharge plan and report any material noncompliance to the court in accordance with § [37.2-817.1](#).

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- d. After observing the person and considering (i) the recommendations of any treating or examining physician or psychologist licensed in Virginia, if available, (ii) any past actions of the person, (iii) any past mental health treatment of the person, (iv) any examiner's certification, (v) any health records available, (vi) the preadmission screening report, and (vii) any other relevant evidence that may have been admitted, if the judge or special justice finds by clear and convincing evidence that (a) the person has a mental illness and that there exists a substantial likelihood that, as a result of mental illness, the person will, in the near future, (1) cause serious physical harm to himself or others as evidenced by recent behavior causing, attempting, or threatening harm and other relevant information, if any, or (2) suffer serious harm due to his lack of capacity to protect himself from harm or to provide for his basic human needs; (b) less restrictive alternatives to involuntary inpatient treatment that would offer an opportunity for improvement of his condition have been investigated and are determined to be appropriate; (c) the person has agreed to abide by his treatment plan and has the ability to do so; and (d) the ordered treatment will be delivered on an outpatient basis by the community services board or designated provider to the person, the judge or special justice shall by written order and specific findings so certify and order that the person be admitted involuntarily to mandatory outpatient treatment. Less restrictive alternatives shall not be determined to be appropriate unless the services are actually available in the community.
- e. Mandatory outpatient treatment may include day treatment in a hospital, night treatment in a hospital, outpatient involuntary treatment with anti-psychotic medication pursuant to Chapter 11 (§ [37.2-1100](#) et seq.), or other appropriate course of treatment as may be necessary to meet the needs of the person. Mandatory outpatient treatment shall not include the use of restraints or physical force of any kind in the provision of the medication. The community services board that serves the county or city in which the person resides shall recommend a specific course of treatment and programs for the provision of mandatory outpatient treatment. The duration of mandatory outpatient treatment shall be determined by the court based on recommendations of the community services board, but shall not exceed 90 days. Upon expiration of an order for mandatory outpatient treatment, the person shall be released from the requirements of the order unless the order is continued in accordance with § [37.2-817.4](#).
- f. Any order for mandatory outpatient treatment entered pursuant to subsection D shall include an initial mandatory outpatient treatment plan developed by the community services board that completed the preadmission screening report. The plan shall, at a minimum, (i) identify the specific services to be provided, (ii) identify the provider who has agreed to provide each service, (iii) describe the

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arrangements made for the initial in-person appointment or contact with each service provider, and (iv) include any other relevant information that may be available regarding the mandatory outpatient treatment ordered. The order shall require the community services board to monitor the implementation of the mandatory outpatient treatment plan and report any material noncompliance to the court.

- g. No later than five days, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, or legal holidays, after an order for mandatory outpatient treatment has been entered pursuant to subsection D, the community services board where the person resides that is responsible for monitoring compliance with the order shall file a comprehensive mandatory outpatient treatment plan. The comprehensive mandatory outpatient treatment plan shall (i) identify the specific type, amount, duration, and frequency of each service to be provided to the person, (ii) identify the provider that has agreed to provide each service included in the plan, (iii) certify that the services are the most appropriate and least restrictive treatment available for the person, (iv) certify that each provider has complied and continues to comply with applicable provisions of the Department's licensing regulations, (v) be developed with the fullest possible involvement and participation of the person and his family, with the person's consent, and reflect his preferences to the greatest extent possible to support his recovery and self-determination, (vi) specify the particular conditions with which the person shall be required to comply, and (vii) describe how the community services board shall monitor the person's compliance with the plan and report any material noncompliance with the plan. The community services board shall submit the comprehensive mandatory outpatient treatment plan to the court for approval. Upon approval by the court, the comprehensive mandatory outpatient treatment plan shall be filed with the court and incorporated into the order of mandatory outpatient treatment. Any subsequent substantive modifications to the plan shall be filed with the court for review and attached to any order for mandatory outpatient treatment.
- h. If the community services board responsible for developing the comprehensive mandatory outpatient treatment plan determines that the services necessary for the treatment of the person's mental illness are not available or cannot be provided to the person in accordance with the order for mandatory outpatient treatment, it shall notify the court within five business days of the entry of the order for mandatory outpatient treatment. Within two business days of receiving such notice, the judge or special justice, after notice to the person, the person's attorney, and the community services board responsible for developing the comprehensive mandatory outpatient treatment plan shall hold a hearing pursuant

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to § [37.2-817.2](#).

- i. Upon entry of any order for mandatory outpatient treatment entered pursuant to subsection D, the clerk of the court shall provide a copy of the order to the person who is the subject of the order, to his attorney, and to the community services board required to monitor compliance with the plan. The community services board shall acknowledge receipt of the order to the clerk of the court on a form established by the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court and provided by the court for this purpose within five business days.
- j. The court may transfer jurisdiction of the case to the district court where the person resides at any time after the entry of the mandatory outpatient treatment order. The community services board responsible for monitoring compliance with the mandatory outpatient treatment plan or discharge plan shall remain responsible for monitoring the person's compliance with the plan until the community services board serving the locality to which jurisdiction of the case has been transferred acknowledges the transfer and receipt of the order to the clerk of the court on a form established by the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court and provided by the court for this purpose. The community services board serving the locality to which jurisdiction of the case has been transferred shall acknowledge the transfer and receipt of the order within five business days.
- k. Any order entered pursuant to this section shall provide for the disclosure of medical records pursuant to § [37.2-804.2](#). This subsection shall not preclude any other disclosures as required or permitted by law.

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**The Virginia Survivors of Homicide & Violent Crime
Advocacy Programs**

Victims of Crime

Code of Virginia §19.2-11.01

A victim of crime is anyone who has suffered physical, psychological, or economic harm as a direct result of a felony or certain misdemeanors.

- a) The definition of victim includes
 - a. spouses and children of all victims.
 - b. parents, guardians and siblings of minor victims
 - c. parents guardians and siblings of mentally or physically incapacitated victims or victims of homicide
 - d. Foster parents or other caregivers, under certain circumstances

Victim Services Unit

1-800-560-4292
6900 Atmore drive
Richmond, Va 23225

Mothers Against Violence

PO Box 1675
Yorktown, VA 23692
tjones@mav4life.org

Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance

1118 W. Main Street
Richmond, Va 23220
info@vsdvalliance.org
(804)-377-0335

Family Resource center, Inc.

P.O. Box 612
Wytheville, Va 24382
(276)-625-0219
24 hour hotline:800-613-6145

Compassion Friends

Fairfax, Va
Local Chapter Cell Phone: 703-622-3639
1-877-969-0010
www.compassionatefriends.org

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Mental Health Consultation and Counseling Resources

Mental health is a crucial component in identifying, properly addressing and finally treating individuals at danger of presenting threatening behavior. The following material includes nationally available resources and a few specific to Virginia. Members of the community, like law enforcement, schools, and families should be aware of the mental health consultations and counseling resources available, in the community, state and nation. They should make full use of the resources when evaluating and responding to dangerous behavior.

Mental Health Resource Material. Potential warnings signs, including mental health indicators are covered in *The school shooter- a quick reference guide* (FBI 2018) and *A Study of the Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States: Between 2000 and 2013* (FBI 2013). Integrating mental health considerations and providers into school violence prevention efforts is addressed in *Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying Assessing, and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks* (FBI), *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment model* (DHS, USSS 2018), and *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Operation Plans*.

NAMI Virginia mission statement: our mission is to promote and improve to improve the life of Virginians with serious mental illness through support, education, and advocacy. We envision a world where all people affected by mental illness get the help, hope, and support that they need. More information can be found on NAMI's website <https://namivirginia.org/mental-health-resources/crisis-info/>.

NAMI Virginia: suicide prevention live line: (800)-273-TALK or (800) SUICIDE, Text "NAMI" to 741741. Other resources include; Mental Health Crisis Hotline: 1-800-442-HOPE or for online chat help <http://hopeline.com/>. A comprehensive list of crisis hotlines can be found at https://addiction.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Depression_Hotlines . And a list of hotlines that cover a variety of topics can be found at <https://namivirginia.org/mental-health-resources/crisis-info/#Mentalhealth>. For further crisis assistance, there are crisis stabilization units available throughout Virginia that could be available for additional support; these units can be found below <https://1pfrv014ujrr1r2k8m4e2igt-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/127/2016/03/Crisis-Stabilization-Units-Statewide-with-Directors-9-11-1.pdf>.

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National Hotline:

- Adolescent Suicide Hotline- 1-800-621-4000
- Youth Crisis Hotline- 1-800-442-HOPE (4673)
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline- 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- SAMHSA - 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- NAMI- 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
National Alliance on Mental Illness
- United Way Information- 211- Provides callers with information on:
 - Rent assistance
 - Food pantries
 - Affordable housing
 - Utility assistance
 - Health and mental health resources
 - Child care and after-school programs
 - Elderly care
 - Job training programs
 - Legal services
 - Crisis intervention
 - Disability services
 - Volunteer opportunities

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 - Legal services
 - Crisis intervention
 - Disability services
 - Volunteer opportunities

Mental Health: Know the Warning Signs



Trying to tell the difference between what expected behaviors are and what might be the signs of a mental health condition isn't always easy. There's no easy test that can let someone know if there is a mental health condition or if actions and thoughts might be typical behaviors of a person or the result of a physical illness.

Each condition has its own set of symptoms but some common signs of mental health conditions in adults and adolescents can include the following.

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable “highs” or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Difficulties understanding or relating to other people
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy
- Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Changes in sex drive
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in reality)
- Inability to perceive changes in one's own feelings, behavior or personality
- Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes (such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing “aches and pains”)

- Thinking about suicide
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance (mostly in adolescents)

Where to Get Help

Don't be afraid to reach out if you or someone you know needs help. Learning all you can about mental health is an important first step.

Reach out to your health insurance, primary care doctor or state/country mental health authority for more resources.

You can also contact the NAMI HelpLine by calling 1-800-650-NAMI or emailing info@nami.org to find out what services and supports are available in your community.

If you or someone you know needs help now, you should immediately call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or call 911.

Receiving a Diagnosis

Knowing warning signs can help let you know if you need to speak to a professional. For many people, getting an accurate diagnosis is the first step in a treatment plan.

Unlike diabetes or cancer, there is no medical test that can accurately diagnose mental health conditions. A mental health professional uses the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the American Psychiatric Association, to assess symptoms and make a diagnosis. The manual lists criteria including feelings and behaviors and time limits in order to be officially classified as a mental health condition.

After diagnosis, a health care provider can help develop a treatment plan that could include medication, therapy or other lifestyle changes.

Mental Health Providers

Clinical social workers are trained to help with individual and family problems, including mental health conditions.

Psychologists are trained in mental health issues. They provide counseling (therapy).

Psychiatrists are medical doctors, so they can prescribe medications. They specialize in mental health conditions.

Finding Treatment

Treatments for mental health conditions vary by diagnosis and by person. Getting a diagnosis is an important first step, knowing your own preferences and goals is also important. There's no "one size fits all" treatment.

In recent years, innovations in treatment options have made living with mental health conditions easier. However, a strong treatment plan goes beyond that. There are many tools that can improve your experience on the road to wellness: medication, counseling (therapy), social support, spiritual practices and education.

Therapy can take many forms, from learning relaxation skills to intensively reworking your thinking patterns.

Social support, acceptance and encouragement from friends, family and the people around you also make a difference.

Education about how to manage a mental health condition can provide you the skills and supports to enrich you and your family's unique journey toward mental health and wellness.

For more information visit www.nami.org/aka

Mental Health and Teens: Watch for Danger Signs

Adolescence isn't an easy time for parents, either. As children move through the various tumultuous transitions that accompany adolescence — physical, emotional, hormonal, sexual, social, intellectual — the pressures and problems they encounter can all too easily seem overwhelming. For many teenagers ([/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/default.aspx](#)), these and other pressures can lead to one or more of a variety of mental health disorders; all are matters of concern, and some are life-threatening.



Key Tips for Parents:

- **Keep communication constant, open, and honest:** Your children should not only know that they can talk to you about anything, you have to be committed to broaching topics of concern and do so openly. Talk about your own experiences and fears when you were an adolescent. Let them know that they are not alone; nor are their anxieties ([/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Anxiety-and-Teens.aspx](#)) unique.
- **Understand that mental health disorders are treatable:** Arm yourself with information about the most common mental health disorders among adolescents; speak with your child's pediatrician, your local health department, your religious leader, and your child's school representatives about what sorts of information are available from them.
- **Be attentive to your teen's behavior:** Adolescence is, indeed, a time of transition and change, but severe, dramatic, or abrupt changes in behavior can be strong indicators of serious mental health issues.

Mental Health “Red Flags” Parents Should Be Alert For:

- Excessive sleeping, beyond usual teenage fatigue, which could indicate depression or substance abuse; difficulty in sleeping, insomnia, and other sleep disorders
- Loss of self-esteem ([/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Signs-of-Low-Self-Esteem.aspx](#))

- Abandonment or loss of interest in favorite pastimes
- Unexpected and dramatic decline in academic performance (</English/ages-stages/teen/school/Pages/Poor-School-Performance-How-Parents-Can-Help.aspx>)
- Weight loss and loss of appetite, which could indicate an eating disorder (</English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Is-Your-Teen-at-Risk-for-Developing-an-Eating-Disorder.aspx>)
- Personality shifts and changes, such as aggressiveness and excess anger that are sharply out of character and could indicate psychological, drug, or sexual problems

Key Mental Health Issues:

Depression

While all of us are subject to “the blues,” clinical depression is a serious medical condition requiring immediate treatment. Watch for:

- Changes in sleep patterns
- Unexpected weeping or excessive moodiness
- Eating habits that result in noticeable weight loss or gain
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Paranoia and excessive secrecy
- Self-mutilation (</English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Teen-Cutting.aspx>), or mention of hurting himself or herself
- Obsessive body-image concerns
- Excessive isolation
- Abandonment of friends and social groups

Eating disorders

Body image concerns can become obsessions, resulting in startling weight loss, severely affecting the adolescent’s health:

- Anorexia: (</English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Warning-Signs-of-Anorexia.aspx>) Avoidance of food and noticeable changes in eating habits should trigger concern.

- [Bulimia: \(/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Eating-Disorders-Bulimia.aspx\)](/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Eating-Disorders-Bulimia.aspx) Purging (forced vomiting) after eating — be alert for both dramatic weight loss without changes in eating habits (which could, of course, indicate other health issues that require a doctor’s attention) and also for immediate trips to the bathroom or other private spot after a meal.

Drug abuse

In addition to peer pressure, mental health issues can lead adolescents not just to experiment with alcohol and drugs, but also to use substances for “self-medication.” And in addition to being aware of the behavioral and physical signs of alcohol and drug abuse — drug and alcohol paraphernalia or evidence, hangovers, slurred speech, etc. — parents should also:

- Be alert for prescription drug [misuse and abuse: \(/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Controlled-Substances-Not-Just-Street-Drugs.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Controlled-Substances-Not-Just-Street-Drugs.aspx) According to the AAP, prescription drug misuse by adolescents is second only to marijuana and alcohol misuse. The most commonly abused prescription drugs include Vicodin and Xanax.
- Know that over-the-counter medications can be abused as well: Teenagers also frequently abuse OTC [cough and cold medications. \(/English/health-issues/conditions/treatments/Pages/Common-Over-the-Counter-Medications.aspx\)](/English/health-issues/conditions/treatments/Pages/Common-Over-the-Counter-Medications.aspx)

Concern about your adolescent’s mental health should first be addressed with your child — fostering open communication goes a long way toward fostering sound adolescent mental health habits.

If your concerns are serious, discuss them with your pediatrician. Because so many mental health issues display physical manifestations — weight loss being the most dramatic but not the only one — your pediatrician can offer both initial medical assessment and also refer you to appropriate mental health organizations and professionals for counseling and treatment [\(/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Mental-Health-Care-Who%27s-Who.aspx\)](/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Mental-Health-Care-Who%27s-Who.aspx) if called for.

Additional Information from www.HealthyChildren.org:

- [Inheriting Mental Disorders \(/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Inheriting-Mental-Disorders.aspx\)](/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Inheriting-Mental-Disorders.aspx)
- [Is Your Child Vulnerable to Substance Abuse? \(/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Is-Your-Child-Vulnerable-to-Substance-Abuse.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Is-Your-Child-Vulnerable-to-Substance-Abuse.aspx)
- [Help Stop Teen Suicide \(/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Help-Stop-Teen-Suicide.aspx\)](/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Help-Stop-Teen-Suicide.aspx)
- [Childhood Depression: What Parents Can Do To Help \(/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Childhood-Depression-What-Parents-Can-Do-To-Help.aspx\)](/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Childhood-Depression-What-Parents-Can-Do-To-Help.aspx)

- [ADHD and Substance Abuse: The Link Parents Need to Know \(/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/Pages/ADHD-and-Substance-Abuse-The-Link-Parents-Need-to-Know.aspx\)](#)

Last Updated 4/26/2012

Source Adapted from Healthy Children Magazine, Winter 2007

The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

Warning Signs of School Violence

ERIC Review

Kevin Dwyer, David Osher, and Cynthia Warger

Spring 2000

Early Warning Signs

It is not always possible to predict behavior that will lead to violence. However, educators and parents and sometimes students can recognize certain early warning signs. In some situations and for some youth, different combinations of events, behaviors, and emotions may lead to aggressive rage or violent behavior toward themselves or others. A good rule of thumb is to assume that these warning signs, especially when they are presented in combination, indicate a need for further analysis to determine an appropriate intervention.

Most children who become violent toward themselves or others feel rejected and psychologically victimized. In most cases, children exhibit aggressive behavior early in life and, if not provided support, will continue a progressive developmental pattern toward severe aggression or violence. However, when children have a positive, meaningful connection to an adult whether it be at home, in school, or in the community the potential for violence is reduced significantly.

None of these signs alone is sufficient for predicting aggression and violence. Moreover, it is inappropriate and potentially harmful to use the early warning signs as a checklist against which to measure individual children. Rather, the early warning signs are offered only as an aid in identifying and referring children who may need help. School communities must ensure that staff and students use the early warning signs only for identification and referral purposes only trained professionals should make diagnoses in consultation with the child's parents or guardian.

The following early warning signs are presented with the qualifications that they are not equally significant and are not presented in order of seriousness:

- Social withdrawal
- Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone
- Excessive feelings of rejection
- Being a victim of violence
- Feelings of being persecuted
- Low school interest and poor academic performance
- Expression of violence in writings and drawings
- Uncontrolled anger
- Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying behaviors
- History of discipline problems
- History of violent and aggressive behavior
- Intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes
- Use of drugs and alcohol
- Affiliation with gangs
- Inappropriate access to firearms
- Serious threats of violence

Imminent Warning Signs

Unlike early warning signs, imminent warning signs indicate that a student is very close to behaving in a way that is potentially dangerous to himself or herself or others. Imminent warning signs require an immediate response.

No single warning sign can predict that a dangerous act will occur. Rather, imminent warning signs usually are presented as a sequence of overt, serious, hostile behaviors or threats directed at peers, staff, or other individuals. Usually, imminent warning signs are evident to more than one staff member as well as to the child's family. When warning signs indicate that danger is imminent, safety must always be the first and foremost consideration. Action must be taken immediately. Imminent warning signs may include

- Serious physical fighting with peers or family members.
- Severe destruction of property.
- Severe rage for seemingly minor reasons.
- Other self-injurious behaviors or threats of suicide.
- Threats of lethal violence.
- A detailed plan (time, place, and method) to harm or kill others, particularly if the child has a history of aggression or has attempted to carry out threats in the past.
- Possession and/or use of firearms and other weapons.

Immediate intervention by school authorities and possibly law enforcement officers is needed when a child has a detailed plan to commit violence or is carrying a weapon. Parents should be informed immediately when students exhibit any threatening behavior. School communities also have the responsibility to seek assistance from child and family services providers, community mental health agencies, and other appropriate organizations. These responses should reflect school board policies and be consistent with violence prevention and response plans.

Source

Dwyer, K., D. Osher, and C. Warger. 1998. *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 418 372. (Available online at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/gtss.html>)

This article is adapted from *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools*, by Kevin Dwyer, David Osher, and Cynthia Warger.

Kevin Dwyer is President of the National Association of School Psychologists in Bethesda, Maryland.

David Osher is Director of the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice at the American Institutes for Research in Washington, DC.

Cynthia Warger is an educational consultant and President of Warger, Eavy, and Associates in Reston, Virginia.



Attacks

Active Shooter

An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. In most cases, active shooters use firearm(s) and have no pattern or method to their selection of victims, which creates an unpredictable and quickly evolving situation that can result in loss of life and injury. Other active shooter attack methods may also include bladed weapons, vehicles, and improvised explosive devices. While law enforcement is usually required to end an active shooter situation, individuals can take steps to prepare mentally and physically for the possibility of this type of event occurring in order to save lives.

Be Alert to Signs of Trouble

While active shooter situations are often unpredictable, paying careful attention to warning signs could go a long way in mitigating a potential incident. Some shooters demonstrate progressively escalating risk factors in their mindsets and behaviors that characterize them as violent prior to an attack. Recognizing these warning signs and reaching out for help could bring at-risk individuals to the attention of law enforcement sooner and prevent a future attack.

Potential warning signs include:

- Increasingly erratic, unsafe, or aggressive behaviors.
- Hostile behavior based on claims of injustice or perceived wrongdoing.
- Drug and alcohol abuse.
- Claims of marginalization or distancing from friends and colleagues.
- Changes in performance at work.
- Sudden and dramatic changes in home life or in personality.
- Financial difficulties.
- Pending civil or criminal litigation.
- Observable grievances and making statements of retribution.

You can help ensure the safety of those around you.

- Be aware of drastic changes in attitude toward others.
- Take note of any escalations in behavior and report to supervisor.
- Provide any information that may help facilitate intervention and mitigate potential risks.

FACTS & EVENTS

- In March 2018, three people were killed by an armed gunman during a hostage situation at Yountville Veterans Home in Napa County, California.
- In February 2018, 17 people including students and teachers were killed and 17 more were wounded when a gunman opened fire inside Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.
- In October 2017, 58 people were killed and 851 were injured when a gunman opened fire from the window of a hotel room on a crowd of concert goers at the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival on the Las Vegas Strip in Nevada.
- In June 2016, 49 people were killed and 58 were injured when a gunman opened fire inside Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida.
- In December 2012, 20 children between six and seven years old as well as six adult staff members were killed when an armed gunman opened fire in Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.
- In July 2012, an armed gunman opened fire at a Century movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, killing 12 people and injuring 70 others.

What Should People Do In Case Of An Active Shooter Attack?



"Run" to the nearest exits, making use of available concealment while moving away from the source of hazard.



If unable to safely evacuate, **"hide"** in a secure area where access can be blocked or entryways can be locked, and, as appropriate, **"fight"**.



If no rapid escape is possible, seek cover behind any available natural or artificial objects that eliminate direct line of sight from the source of hazard.



Call 9-1-1 and remain alert for potential secondary attacks.



Render first aid when safe to do so.



Maintain situational awareness while providing assistance to others.



When help arrives, follow instructions given by law enforcement and first responders.

Protective Measures



Physical Security

- Post signage relating to emergency entry and exit points, first-aid stations, and shelter locations.
- Define the perimeter and areas that require access control, and identify especially sensitive or critical areas that require special access controls.
 - Establish surveillance plan to complement perimeter controls.



Access, Planning, and Personnel

- Conduct periodic background checks on all staff assigned to critical or sensitive areas.
- Review personnel files of recently terminated employees to determine whether they pose a security risk and ensure they are removed from systems.
- Devise credential systems that indicate areas of access and purpose of activity on the premises.
 - Issue special identification badges to contractors, cleaning crews, vendors, and temporary employees.
 - Require that badges be displayed at all times and verified to gain access to the building.
 - Collect all badges when visits are complete.

Additional Resources

- Hometown Security Initiative: <https://www.dhs.gov/hometown-security>
- Active Shooter Preparedness Program: <https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>
- "If You See Something, Say Something®": <https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>
- Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative: <https://nsi.ncirc.gov/>

Protective Security Advisors (PSAs) proactively engage with government partners and the private sector to protect critical infrastructure. For more information or to contact your local PSA, e-mail NICC@hq.dhs.gov.



Homeland
Security

Mass Gatherings

A mass gathering occurs when a large number of people come together in a particular location for a specific purpose. These locations, especially those associated with large crowds, could be an attractive target for terrorism and other crimes. By connecting with local authorities, developing plans to identify issues and support incident response, training staff and volunteers, and reporting concerns to emergency authorities, many incidents may be mitigated or avoided.

In local communities, DHS Protective Security Advisors (PSAs) work with federal, state, and local government officials and private sector partners to protect soft targets and crowded places. In doing so, PSAs encourage businesses to "Connect, Plan, Train, and Report". Applying these four steps in advance of an incident or attack can help better prepare businesses and their employees to proactively think about the role they play in the safety and security of their businesses and communities.

1 Connect

- Clarify emergency response responsibilities and other responsibilities related to venue security and emergency response.
- Develop relationships with local law enforcement, fire response, and other businesses.
- Share information regarding the event and supporting venue layout with local law enforcement, fire response, and emergency management.

2 Plan

- Develop plans for security, emergency response, emergency communications, and business continuity.
- Develop a bomb threat management plan to enable informed decisions and appropriate actions upon receipt of a bomb threat or discovery of suspicious items.
- Establish procedures for evacuating the venue in the event that a threat is deemed too serious to continue the event.
- Implement a communication process to inform event attendees of actions to take in case of an emergency and develop scripts for public address announcements.

3 Train

- Train staff and volunteers on:
 - Security basics, emergency response, emergency communications, and business continuity plans.
 - Staying aware of any suspicious behavior, activities, or items.
 - The "Run, Hide, Fight" response to an active shooter incident and the "Recognize, Avoid, Isolate, and notify" process when confronting suspicious items or packages.
- Provide specialized training for employees who will take additional response actions (e.g., using fire extinguishers, administering first aid).
- Conduct exercises to ensure plans remain applicable, and involve first responders in the exercises to familiarize them with the venue and its security plans, policies, and procedures.

4 Report

- Post details on reporting suspicious activity, and encourage staff, volunteers, vendors, and the general public to report suspicious behavior to property management security or local law enforcement.
- Promote general awareness to identify:
 - Potential surveillance; excessive study of event entrances, exits, security features (e.g., cameras or barriers), or personnel; and unexplained use of binoculars, cameras, and recording devices near an event location.
 - Repeat visitors or outsiders who have no apparent business in restricted areas.
 - Erratic vehicle operation, repeated driving near an event location, and parking in the same area over multiple days with no reasonable explanation.
 - Abandoned parcels, suitcases, backpacks, and packages.
 - Bulky or unseasonable clothing.
 - Other unusual behavior, activities, or items.
- ✚ Establish a system for reporting security concerns.

Protective Measures

Mass gatherings — either in the form of indoor events or outdoor gatherings — can take place in many different formats and configurations. The following protective measures provide some basic actions to be considered by those responsible for the safety and security of these locations.



Physical Security

- Post signage relating to emergency entry and exit points, first-aid stations and shelter locations.
- Post signage identified items that patrons are prohibited from carrying into the venue
- Define the perimeter and areas that require access control for pedestrians and vehicles and identify especially sensitive or critical areas (e.g., control rooms, communications centers, computer server rooms, fuel or chemical storage tanks mechanical equipment) that require special access control.
- Evaluate vehicle traffic patterns near the venue and implement stratifies to reduce vehicle speeds and improve pedestrian safety
- To the extent possible, keep vehicles at a safe distance from areas where large numbers of people congregate and consider whether fixed or temporary vehicle barriers are needed.
- Monitor all vehicles approaching an entrance or gathering of people for signs of threatening or suspicious behavior (e.g., unusually high speed



vehicles riding particularly low, vehicles emitting a chemical odor, occupants keeping the windows open even in cold or inclement weather)

Access, Planning, and Personnel

- Conduct background checks on all staff assigned to critical or sensitive areas.
- Review personnel files of recently terminated employees to determine whether they pose a security risk.
- Devise credential systems that indicate areas of access and purpose of activity on the premises.
- Design a monitoring, surveillance, and inspection program that is consistent with venue operations and associated security requirements. If surveillance cameras are used, train personnel to interpret video and identify potential security- related events.

Additional Resources for Owners and Operators

- Hometown Security Initiative: <https://www.dhs.gov/hometown-security>
- Active Shooter Preparedness Program: <https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>
- “If You See Something, Say Something®”: <https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>
- Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative: <https://nsi.ncirc.gov/>

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Mass Gatherings



A mass gathering occurs when a large number of people come together in a particular location for a specific purpose. These locations, especially those associated with large crowds, could be an attractive target for terrorism and other crimes. If everyone plays their part, we can keep our neighborhoods, communities, and the nation safe against the threats we face.

Be Prepared



Take notice of your surroundings and identify potential emergency exit routes.



Be aware of unusual behaviors, unattended objects, unexplained odors, or vehicles traveling at abnormal speeds or patterns.



Establish locations to meet if separated from your group.



Report any suspicious items or activities to law enforcement and/or onsite security personnel.

Don't Hesitate – Take Action



If an attack occurs, run to the nearest exit, making use of available concealment while moving away from the source of hazard.



If no secure areas are available, protect yourself from harm by seeking cover behind any available natural or artificial objects that eliminate direct line of sight from the source of hazard.



Cover your nose and mouth if you notice unusual odors or eye irritation.



If you are unable to safely evacuate, hide in a secure area where access can be blocked or entryways can be locked.

Assist and React



Call 9-1-1 and remain alert for potential secondary attacks.



Maintain situational awareness while providing assistance to others.



Render first aid when safe to do so.



When help arrives, follow instructions given by law enforcement and first responders.

Additional Resources

- Hometown Security Initiative: <https://www.dhs.gov/hometown-security>
- Active Shooter Preparedness Program: <https://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness>
- "If You See Something, Say Something®": <https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>
- Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative: <https://nsi.ncirc.gov/>

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WITH AN ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATION

OF AN ACTIVE SHOOTER

- Be aware of your environment and any possible dangers
- Take note of the two nearest exits in any facility you visit
- If you are in an office, stay there and secure the door
- Attempt to take the active shooter down as a last resort

An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area, typically through the use of firearms.

CHARACTERISTICS

Contact your building management or human resources department for more information and training on active shooter response in your workplace.



OF AN ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATION

- Victims are selected at random
- The event is unpredictable and evolves quickly
- Law enforcement is usually required to end an active shooter situation

HOW TO RESPOND

WHEN AN ACTIVE SHOOTER IS IN YOUR VICINITY

1. RUN

- Have an escape route and plan in mind
- Leave your belongings behind
- Keep your hands visible

2. HIDE

- Hide in an area out of the shooter's view
- Block entry to your hiding place and lock the doors
- Silence your cell phone and/or pager

3. FIGHT

- As a last resort and only when your life is in imminent danger
- Attempt to incapacitate the shooter
- Act with physical aggression and throw items at the active shooter

CALL 911 WHEN IT IS SAFE TO DO SO

HOW TO RESPOND

WHEN LAW ENFORCEMENT ARRIVES

- Remain calm and follow instructions
- Put down any items in your hands (i.e., bags, jackets)
- Raise hands and spread fingers
- Keep hands visible at all times
- Avoid quick movements toward officers such as holding on to them for safety
- Avoid pointing, screaming or yelling
- Do not stop to ask officers for help or direction when evacuating

INFORMATION

YOU SHOULD PROVIDE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT OR 911 OPERATOR

- Location of the active shooter
- Number of shooters
- Physical description of shooters

- Number and type of weapons held by shooters
- Number of potential victims at the location

ENHANCING SCHOOL SAFETY USING A THREAT ASSESSMENT MODEL

An Operational Guide for
Preventing Targeted School Violence



*U.S. Department of
Homeland Security*

**United States
Secret Service**

National Threat Assessment Center
July 2018

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Since the creation of the U.S. Secret Service in 1865, the agency has evolved to meet changing mission demands and growing threats in our nation. To ensure we remain on the forefront, the U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) was created in 1998 to provide guidance and training on threat assessment both within the U.S. Secret Service and to others with criminal justice and public safety responsibilities. Today, the highly skilled men and women of the U. S. Secret Service lead the field of threat assessment by conducting research on acts of Targeted violence and providing training using the agency's established threat assessment model for prevention.

Our agency is dedicated to expanding research and understanding of targeted violence, including those that impact our nation's schools. Since the creation of the U.S. Secret Service's NTAC, we have provided 450 in-depth trainings on the prevention of targeted school violence to over 93,000 attendees including school administrators, teachers, counselors, mental health professionals, school resource officers, and other public safety partners. Our agency, through our local U.S. Secret Service field officers, continues to coordinate and provide this training to our community partners.

The tragic events of the February 14, 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and the May 18, 2018 shooting at Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas, demonstrated the ongoing need to provide leadership in preventing future school attacks. As such, the U.S. Secret Service, along with many of our partners,

have redoubled our efforts and are poised to continue enhancing school safety. Keeping our school children safe requires the shared commitment from states, school boards, and communities with the ability to dedicate resources to this critical issue. In the wake of these tragedies, the U.S. Secret Service has launched an initiative to provide updated research and guidance to school personnel, law enforcement, and other public safety partners on the prevention of school-based violence. I am pleased to release this operational guide, *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model*, as the first phase of this initiative.

As we have seen in recent months, the pain of each act of targeted violence in our nation's schools has had a Powerful impact on all. With the creation and distribution of this operational guide, the U.S. Secret Service sets a path forward for sustainable practices to keep our children safe, extending our expertise in the field of threat assessments to provide school officials, law enforcement personnel, and other public safety professionals with guidance on "how to" create a Targeted Violence Prevention Plan. This guide will serve as an important contribution to our partners on the Federal Commission on School Safety - the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of the Attorney General. I am proud of the continued efforts of the U.S. Secret Service, and we remain committed to the prevention of targeted violence within our nation's schools and communities.



Randolph D. Alles
Director

INTRODUCTION

“There is no profile of a student attacker.”

When incidents of school violence occur, they leave a profound and lasting impact on the school, the community, and our nation as a whole. Ensuring safe environments for elementary and secondary school students, educators, administrators, and others is essential. This operational guide was developed to provide fundamental direction on how to prevent incidents of *targeted school violence*, that is, when a student specifically selects a school or a member of the school community for harm. The content in this guide is based on information developed by the U.S. Secret Service, Protective Intelligence and Assessment Division, National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC).

Over the last 20 years, NTAC has conducted research, training, and consultation on threat assessment and the prevention of various forms of targeted violence. Following the tragedy at Columbine High School in April 1999, the Secret Service partnered with the Department of Education on a study that examined 37 incidents of targeted violence that occurred at elementary and secondary schools (i.e., K-12). The goal of that study, the *Safe School Initiative (SSI)*, was to gather and analyze accurate and useful information about the thinking and behavior of students who commit these types of acts. The findings of the *SSI*, and an accompanying guide, served as the impetus for establishing threat assessment programs in schools. In 2008, the agencies collaborated again and released a report that further explored one of the key *SSI* findings, namely, that prior to most attacks, though other students had information about the attackers' plans, most did not report their concerns to an adult. The findings of this report, known as the *Bystander Study*, highlighted the importance of creating safe school climates to increase the likelihood that students will speak up in order to prevent an attack.¹

The information gleaned from these studies underscores the importance of establishing a threat assessment process in schools to enhance proactive targeted violence prevention efforts. The goal of a threat assessment is to identify students of concern, assess their risk for engaging in violence or other harmful activities, and identify intervention strategies to manage that risk. This guide provides actionable steps that schools can take to develop a comprehensive targeted violence prevention plan and create processes and procedures for conducting threat assessments on their campus. These steps serve as minimum guidelines and may need to be adapted for a particular school or district's unique resources and challenges. For institutions that already have prevention plans or threat assessment capabilities in place, these guidelines may provide additional information to update existing protocols, or to formalize the structures of reporting, gathering information, and managing risk.

When establishing threat assessment capabilities within K-12 schools, keep in mind that **there is no profile of a student attacker**. There have been male and female attackers, high-achieving students with good grades as well as poor performers. These acts of violence were committed by students who were loners and socially isolated, and those who were well-liked and popular. Rather than focusing solely on a student's personality traits or school performance, we can learn much more about a student's risk for violence by working through the threat assessment process, which is designed to gather the most relevant information about the student's communications and behaviors, the negative or stressful events the student has experienced, and the resources the student possesses to overcome those setbacks and challenges.

¹ All publications related to studies conducted by the U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) are available from <https://www.secretservice.gov/protection/ntac/>.

CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE TARGETED VIOLENCE PREVENTION PLAN

Ensuring the safety of our schools involves multiple components, including physical security, emergency management, and violence prevention efforts in the form of a threat assessment process. This process begins with establishing a comprehensive targeted violence prevention plan. The plan includes forming a multidisciplinary threat assessment team, establishing central reporting mechanisms, identifying behaviors of concern, defining the threshold for law enforcement intervention, identifying risk management strategies, promoting safe school climates, and providing training to stakeholders. It can also help schools mitigate threats from a variety of individuals, including students, employees, or parents.

This guide provides basic instructions for schools on creating a targeted violence prevention plan, the focus of which is to decrease the risk of *students* engaging in harm to themselves or the school community. These recommendations serve as the starting point on a path to implementation that will need to be customized to the specific needs of your school, your student body, and your community. When creating these plans, schools should consult with legal representatives to ensure that they comply with any applicable state and federal laws or regulations.

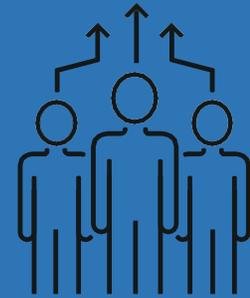
Step 1.

Establish a multidisciplinary threat assessment team

The first step in developing a comprehensive targeted violence prevention plan is to establish a multidisciplinary threat assessment team (hereafter referred to as the “Team”) of individuals who will direct, manage, and document the threat assessment process. The Team will receive reports about concerning students and situations, gather additional information, assess the risk posed to the school community, and develop intervention and management strategies to mitigate any risk of harm. Some considerations for establishing a Team include:

- Some schools may pool their resources and have a single Team that serves an entire district or county, while other districts may choose to have a separate Team for each school.
- Teams should include personnel from a **variety of disciplines** within the school community, including teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, school resource officers, mental health professionals, and school administrators. The multidisciplinary nature of the Team ensures that varying points of view will be represented and that access to information and resources will be broad.
- The Team needs to have a **specifically designated leader**. This position is usually occupied by a senior administrator within the school.
- Teams should establish **protocols and procedures** that are followed for each assessment, including who will interview the student of concern; who will talk to classmates, teachers, or parents; and who will be responsible for documenting the Team’s efforts. Established protocols allow for a smoother assessment process as Team members will be aware of their own roles and responsibilities, as well as those of their colleagues.
- Team members should meet whenever a concerning student or situation has been brought to their attention, but they should also **meet on a regular basis** to engage in discussions, role-playing scenarios, and other team-building and learning activities. This will provide members of the Team with opportunities to work together and learn their individual responsibilities so that when a crisis does arise, the Team will be able to operate more easily as a cohesive unit.

“ ...meet on a regular basis...”



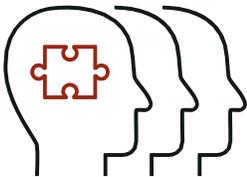
While the information in this guide refers to this group as a Threat Assessment Team, schools can choose an alternative name. For example, some schools have opted to use the label “Assessment and Care Team” to encourage involvement from those who might be concerned about a student, and to focus on getting a student access to needed resources and supports. Other schools have chosen to refer to this group as a “Behavioral Intervention Team” to focus on a spectrum of concerning behaviors that a student may be exhibiting. Finally, some schools have continued to refer to their groups as “Threat Assessment Teams” to highlight the heightened sense of concern about a student who is identified.

Step 2.

Define prohibited and concerning behaviors

Schools need to establish policies defining prohibited behaviors that are unacceptable and therefore warrant immediate intervention. These include threatening or engaging in violence, bringing a weapon to school, bullying or harassing others, and other concerning or criminal behaviors. Keep in mind that **concerning behaviors occur along a continuum**. School policies should also identify behaviors that may not necessarily be indicative of violence, but also warrant some type of intervention. These include a marked decline in performance; increased absenteeism; withdrawal or isolation; sudden or dramatic changes in behavior or appearance; drug or alcohol use; and erratic, depressive, and other emotional or mental health symptoms.

- If these behaviors are observed or reported to the Team, schools can offer resources and supports in the form of mentoring and counseling, mental health care, tutoring, or social and family services.
- The **threshold for intervention** should be relatively low so that Teams can identify students in distress before their behavior escalates to the point that classmates, teachers, or parents are concerned about their safety or the safety of others. It is much easier to intervene when the concern is related to a student's struggle to overcome personal setbacks, such as a romantic breakup, than when there are concerns about threats posed to others.
- During the assessment process, Teams may identify other **concerning statements and actions** made by the student that may not already be addressed in their policies. Gathering information about these behaviors will help the Team assess whether the student is at risk for attacking the school or its students and identify strategies to mitigate that risk.

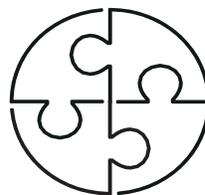


Step 3.

Create a central reporting mechanism

Students may elicit concern from those around them in a variety of ways. They may make threatening or concerning statements in person, online, or in text messages; they may engage in observable risky behavior; or they may turn in assignments with statements or content that is unusual or bizarre. When this occurs, those around the student need a method of reporting their concerns to the Team.

- Schools can **establish one or more reporting mechanisms**, such as an online form posted on the school website, a dedicated email address or phone number, smart phone application platforms, or another mechanism that is accessible for a particular school community.
- Students, teachers, staff, school resource officers, and parents should be **provided training and guidance on recognizing behaviors of concern, their roles and responsibilities in reporting the behavior, and how to report the information.**
- Teams need to be sure that a team member proactively monitors all incoming reports and can **respond immediately** when someone's safety is concerned.
- Regardless of what method schools choose to receive these reports, there should be an **option for passing information anonymously**, as students are more likely to report concerning or threatening information when they can do so without fear of retribution for coming forward.
- The school community should feel confident that team members will be responsive to their concerns, and that **reports will be acted upon, kept confidential, and handled appropriately.**



“...reports will be acted upon...”

Many reporting mechanisms employed by K-12 schools resemble nationwide criminal reporting apps. The online and phone reporting capabilities of these types of apps allow individuals across the country, including students, parents, and teachers, to report crimes and other concerning behaviors in their communities and schools. Some reporting mechanisms are developed specifically for use by students in K-12 school settings. These programs allow students, parents, and teachers to anonymously report threats, bullying, and other situations that make them feel unsafe or fear for the safety of a peer to trained experts who respond appropriately.

Step 4.

Determine the threshold for law enforcement intervention

The vast majority of incidents or concerns that are likely to be reported can be handled by school personnel using school or community resources. For example, the most common types of reports submitted to Safe2Tell Colorado during the 2016-2017 school year were related to suicide, bullying, drugs, cutting (self-harm), and depression.² Some of these common reports may not require the involvement of law enforcement. Those that do warrant law enforcement intervention include threats of violence and planned school attacks, which constituted Safe2Tell's sixth and seventh most common types of reports, respectively.

- Reports regarding student behaviors **involving weapons, threats of violence, physical violence, or concerns about an individual's safety** should immediately be reported to local law enforcement. This is one reason why **including a school resource officer or local law enforcement officer** on the Team is beneficial.
- If a school resource officer is not available to serve on the Team, schools should set a clear threshold for times and situations when **law enforcement will be asked to support or take over an assessment**. For example, it might be necessary to have law enforcement speak with a student's parent or guardian, search a student's person or possessions, or collect additional information about the student or situation outside the school community during the assessment.

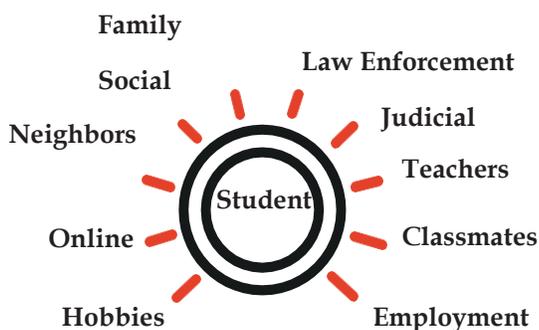
²Data2Report 2016-2017. (n.d.). Safe2Tell Colorado. Retrieved on June 20, 2018, from <https://safe2tell.org/sites/default/files/u18/End%20of%20Year%202016-2017%20Data2Report.pdf>

Step 5.

Establish assessment procedures

Teams need to establish clearly defined processes and procedures to guide their assessments. Note that any safety concerns should be immediately addressed before the procedures described below take place. When followed, the procedures should allow the Team to form an accurate picture of the student's thinking, behavior, and circumstances to inform the Team's assessment and identify appropriate interventions.

- **Maintain documentation** to keep track of when reports come in; the information that is gathered; when, where, and how it was obtained; who was interviewed; the behaviors and circumstances of the student of concern; and the intervention strategies taken. Documentation requirements, such as forms and templates, should be included in the plan to ensure standardization across cases.
- **Use a community systems approach.** An effective approach for gathering information to assess a student of concern is to **identify the sources that may have information on the student's actions and circumstances.** This involves identifying the persons with whom the student has a relationship or frequently interacts and the *organizations or platforms* that may be familiar with the student's behaviors. Students exist in more than one system and they come in contact with people beyond their classmates and teachers at school. Gathering information from multiple sources ensures that Teams are identifying concerning behaviors, accurately assessing the student's risks and needs, and providing the appropriate interventions, supports, and resources.
- **Examine online social media pages, conduct interviews, review class assignments, and consider searching the student's locker or desk.** Team members should also review **academic, disciplinary, law enforcement, and other formal records** that may be related to the student. When reviewing school records, be sure to determine whether the student has been the subject of previous reports to school officials, especially if the student has a history of engaging in other concerning or threatening behaviors. Also determine if the student received any intervention or supports and whether those were beneficial or successful. The Team may be able to draw on information from previous incidents and interventions to address the current situation for the student. This factor further emphasizes the importance of the Team's documentation to ensure the accuracy and availability of information regarding prior contacts the student of concern may have had with the Team.



Step 5 continued.

Establish assessment procedures

- **Build rapport that can facilitate information-gathering efforts.** By demonstrating that their goal is to support individuals who may be struggling, while ensuring that the student and the school are safe, Teams may be better able to build a positive relationship with a student of concern and the student's parents or guardians. When Teams have established this rapport, parents or guardians may be more likely to share their own concerns, and the student may be more forthcoming about frustrations, needs, goals, or plans.
- **Evaluate the student's concerning behaviors and communications in the context of his/her age and social and emotional development.** Some students' behaviors might seem unusual or maladaptive, but may be normal for adolescent behavior or in the context of a mental or developmental disorder. To ensure that these students are being accurately assessed, collect information from diverse sources, including the reporting party, the student of concern, classmates, teammates, teachers, and friends. Consider whether those outside of their immediate circle, such as neighbors or community groups, may be in a position to share information regarding observed behaviors.

Key Themes to Guide Threat Assessment Investigations

U.S. Secret Service research identified the following themes to explore when conducting a threat assessment investigation:

- The student's motives and goals
- Concerning, unusual, or threatening communications
- Inappropriate interest in weapons, school shooters, mass attacks, or other types of violence
- Access to weapons
- Stressful events, such as setbacks, challenges, or losses
- Impact of emotional and developmental issues
- Evidence of desperation, hopelessness, or suicidal thoughts and gestures
- Whether the student views violence as an option to solve problems
- Whether others are concerned about the student's statements or behaviors
- Capacity to carry out an attack
- Evidence of planning for an attack
- Consistency between the student's statements and actions
- Protective factors such as positive or prosocial influences and events

Investigative themes

Teams should organize their information gathering around **several themes or areas pertaining to the student's actions, circumstances, and any other relevant Threat assessment factors**. Addressing each theme is necessary for a complete assessment and may uncover other avenues of inquiry to help determine whether the student is at risk for engaging in violence. Using the themes to identify where the student might be struggling will help the Team identify the most appropriate resources. Keep in mind, there is no need to wait until the Team has completed all interviews or addressed every theme before taking action. As soon as an area for intervention is identified, suitable management strategies should be enacted.

Motives

Students may have a variety of motives that place them at risk for engaging in harmful behavior, whether to themselves or others. If you can discover the student's motivation for engaging in the concerning behavior that brought him/her to the attention of the Team, then you can understand more about the student's goals. The Team should also assess how far the student may be willing to go to achieve these goals, and what or who may be a potential target. Understanding motive further allows the Team to develop management strategies that can direct the student away from violent choices.

On February 12, 2016, a 15-year-old female student fatally shot her girlfriend while they were sitting under a covered patio at their high school and then fatally shot herself. In several notes found after the incident, the student explained that she carried out her attack because her girlfriend had recently confessed that she was contemplating ending their relationship. She also wrote in her notes that she hated who she was and that learning her girlfriend wanted to end their relationship "destabilized" her.

Step 5 continued.

Establish assessment procedures, *Investigative themes*

Communications

Look for concerning, unusual, bizarre, threatening, or violent communications the student made. The student's communications may reveal grievances held about certain issues or a possible intended target. They may allude to violent intentions or warn others to stay away from school at a certain time. They may reveal information relevant to the other investigative themes by making reference to feelings of hopelessness or suicide, a fascination with violence, interest in weapons, or other inappropriate interests. These statements might be made in person to classmates, teammates, or friends; in writing on assignments or tests; and/or via social media, text messages, or photo or video-sharing sites.

Earlier NTAC research that examined attacks on schools found that not every student directly threatened their target prior to attack, but in a majority of incidents (81%), another person was aware of what the student was thinking or planning.³ It is important for Teams to remember that a student who has **not made threatening statements may still be at risk** for engaging in violence. Whether or not the student made a direct threat should not be the lone indicator of concern.

On October 24, 2014, a 15-year-old male student opened fire on five of his closest friends as they were having lunch in the school cafeteria, killing four of them, and then fatally shot himself. In the months prior to his attack, the student sent a number of text messages to his ex-girlfriend indicating he was considering suicide and posted videos on Snapchat that mentioned suicide. Two people confronted the student about his concerning statements, but he told them he was just joking or having a bad moment. The student also posted a number of Twitter messages indicating he was having trouble overcoming a setback, posting in one Tweet, "It breaks me... It actually does... I know it seems like I'm sweating it off... But I'm not.. And I never will be able to..."



³U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education. (May 2002). Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and to creating safe school climates. Retrieved April 5, 2018, from https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf.

Inappropriate interests

Gather information about whether the student has shown an **inappropriate or heightened interest in concerning topics such as school attacks or attackers, mass attacks, or other types of violence**. These interests might appear in the student's communications, the books the student reads, the movies the student watches, or the activities the student enjoys. The *context* of the student's interests is an important factor to consider. For example, a student's interest in weapons may not be concerning if the student is a hunter or is on the school's rifle team, with no evidence of an inappropriate or unhealthy fixation on weapons. In other situations, the context surrounding a student's interest in weapons could be of concern. For example, if a student is fixated on past school shooters or discusses what firearm would be best to use in a mass attack.

On October 21, 2013, a 12-year-old male student took a handgun to his middle school and opened fire, injuring two classmates and killing a teacher. He then fatally shot himself. In the months leading up to his attack, the student conducted numerous internet searches for violent material and content, including "Top 10 evil children," "Super Columbine Massacre Role Playing Game," "shoot," "guns," "bullets," "revenge," "murder," "school shootings," and "violent game." He also searched for music videos of and songs about school shootings. On his cell phone, the student had saved photos of violent war scenes and images of the Columbine High School shooters. He also enjoyed playing video games, doing so for several hours each night. Of his 69 video games, 47 were first-person shooter or similar games.

Weapons access

In addition to determining whether the student has any inappropriate interests or fascination with weapons, the Team should assess whether the student has **access to weapons**. Because many school attackers used firearms acquired from their homes, consider whether the family keeps weapons at home or if there is a relative or friend who has weapons. Sometimes parents who keep weapons at home incorrectly assume that their children are unaware of where they are stored or how to access them. If there are weapons at home, the Team should determine if they are stored appropriately and if the student knows how to use them or has done so in the past. The Team should also remember that firearms are not the only weapons to be concerned about. Even though many school attackers have used firearms in carrying out their attacks, explosives, incendiary devices, bladed weapons, or combinations of these weapons have been used in past attacks.

On April 29, 2014, a 17-year-old male student was arrested after a concerned citizen called police when she observed the student acting suspiciously around a storage unit and thought he might be attempting to break into one. Responding officers discovered bomb-making material and other weapons inside the unit the student had asked a friend's mother to rent for him. The student later confessed to an extensive plot that involved murdering his parents and sister, setting a diversionary fire, planting explosive devices at his high school, targeting students and the school resource officer for harm, and engaging in gunfire with responding police officers before committing suicide. The student admitted that at some point he became fascinated with chemicals, explosives, and weapons and began researching how to build his own explosive devices. He created his own channel on YouTube to post videos that showed him detonating his devices and included a written commentary about each video.

Step 5 continued.

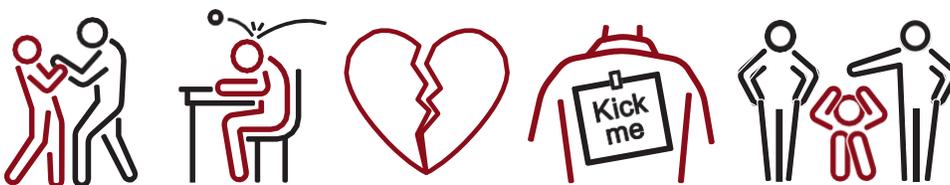
Establish assessment procedures, *Investigative themes*

Stressors

All students face stressors such as **setbacks, losses, and other challenges** as part of their lives. While many students are resilient and can overcome these situations, for some, these stressors may become overwhelming and ultimately influence their decision to carry out an attack at school. Gather information on stressors the student is experiencing, how the student is coping with them, and whether there are supportive friends or family who can help the student overcome them. Assess whether the student experienced stressors in the past that are still having an effect, such as a move to a new school, and whether there might be additional setbacks or losses in the near future, like a relationship that might be ending.

Stressors can occur in all areas of a student's life, including at school with coursework, friendships, romantic relationships, or teammates; or outside of school with parents, siblings, or at jobs. Many students can experience bullying, a stressor which can take place in person at school or online at home. Teams should intervene and prevent bullying and cyberbullying of a student who has been brought to their attention. More broadly, administrators should work to address any concerns regarding bullying school-wide and ensure their school has a safe climate for all students.

On November 12, 2008, a 15-year-old female student fatally shot a classmate while students were changing classes. The attacker fled to a restaurant across the street from her high school and phoned 9-1-1 to turn herself in to police. Prior to her attack, she faced a number of stressors in her life, mostly outside of school. As an infant, her college-aged parents abandoned her and she was raised largely by her grandparents. At the age of six years, she was sexually molested by a family member; and at age 12, she was raped by an uncle. She did have some contact with her birth parents, but her mother was reportedly abusive and suffered from severe mental illness; and her father began serving a 25-year prison sentence for murder around the time she was 14 years old. At her high school, she was lonely, appeared to struggle to connect with others, and had behavior problems.



Emotional and developmental issues

Anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide, and other mental health issues are important factors to consider when conducting an assessment. Keep in mind that students with emotional issues or developmental disorders might behave in a way that is maladaptive, but might not be concerning or threatening because the behavior is a product of their diagnosis. **Behaviors exhibited by a student with a diagnosed disorder need to be evaluated in the context of that diagnosis and the student's known baseline of behavior.** If the student is experiencing feelings related to a diagnosable mental illness, such as depression, then the Team needs to consider the effect of these feelings on their behaviors when assessing the student's risk of engaging in harm to self or others.

On January 18, 1993, a 17-year-old male student fatally shot his English teacher and a school custodian at his high school and held classmates hostage before surrendering to police. The student had recently turned in a poem to his English teacher for an assignment that discussed his thoughts of committing homicide or suicide. The student had failed in at least three prior suicide attempts, including one the night before his attack. Although the student entered a plea of guilty but mentally ill at trial, ultimately he was convicted and sentenced to life in prison.



Desperation or despair

Assess whether the student feels **hopeless, desperate, or out of options**. Determine if the student has had thoughts about or engaged in behaviors that would indicate the student's desperation. The Team should determine whether the student has felt this way before, how the student managed those feelings then, and whether those same resources for coping are available to the student now. Consider whether the student has tried addressing the problems in a positive way, but was unable to resolve them, thereby leading to a sense of hopelessness about their situation.

On February 1, 1997, a 16-year-old male student used a shotgun to fire on fellow students in the common area of his high school prior to the start of the school day. He killed one student and the principal and injured two additional students. Prior to his attack, the student had been bullied and teased by several classmates, including the student killed. At some point prior to his attack, the student asked the principal and dean of students for help with the bullying he was experiencing. They intervened, and though the situation improved temporarily, the teasing and bullying soon resumed. The student asked the principal for help a second time, but this time the principal advised him to just ignore the bullies. The student tried, but felt like the victimization worsened and he began to feel hopeless that it would ever end. After his attack, the student explained that he felt as though he had asked the "proper people" for assistance, but he was denied help, so he decided that bringing a gun to school would scare his tormentors and get them to leave him alone. When some friends learned of the plan, they told him that he had to use the weapon to shoot people or the bullying would continue. The student decided he would have to fire the weapon at people in order to end his torment.

Step 5 continued.

Establish assessment procedures, *Investigative themes*

Violence as an option

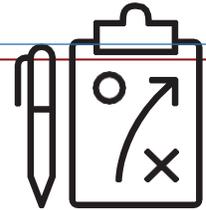
Some students, who are feeling hopeless and out of options, **may think violence is the only way to solve a problem or settle a grievance**. The Team should look to see whether the student thinks violence is acceptable or necessary, if the student has used violence in the past to address problems, and whether the student has thought of alternative ways to address the grievances. The Team should also assess whether peers, or others, support and encourage the student to use violence as a means to an end. If possible, connect the student with more positive, prosocial role models who discourage violence and identify more acceptable ways to solve problems.

On March 25, 2011, a 15-year-old male student fired two shots at a classmate, wounding him in the abdomen. After firing the weapon, the student fled the scene and dropped the gun in a field. He was arrested about an hour after the incident. The student had a history of being involved in numerous physical altercations with other students throughout his 6th, 7th, and 8th grade school years. Additionally, he tried to start a fight with the targeted victim, and once threatened him with a chain. About three weeks prior to the attack, the student threatened to blow up the school. Days prior to the incident, the student, who was angry at the targeted victim, told a friend that he planned to kill him.

Concerned others

In previous incidents, many students made statements or engaged in behaviors prior to their attacks that elicited concern from others in their lives. Assess whether parents, friends, classmates, teachers, or others who know the student are worried about the student and whether they have taken any actions in response to their concerns. Gather information on the specific behaviors that caused worry or fear. These could include **behaviors that may have elicited concerns about the safety of the student or others**, such as unusual, bizarre or threatening statements; intimidating or aggressive acts; indications of planning for an attack; suicidal ideations or gestures; or a fixation on a specific target. **Other behaviors that elicit concern may not necessarily be indicative of violence**, but do require that the Team assess the behavior and provide appropriate supports. Examples of these behaviors include alcohol or drug use; behavior changes related to academic performance, social habits, mood, or physical appearance; conflicts with others; and withdrawal or isolation.

On December 7, 2017, a 21-year-old male shot and killed two students at his former high school before fatally shooting himself. Prior to his attack, a number of individuals had expressed concern regarding his behaviors and statements. Sometime in 2012, other users of an online forum were concerned after the student made threats about attacking his school. In March 2016, federal investigators met with the student after he made comments in an online chat room about wanting to find an inexpensive assault rifle he could use for a mass shooting. At the time, a family member told the investigators that the student was troubled and liked to make outlandish statements. At some point prior to his attack, the student posted content supportive of the attacks at Columbine High School in an online forum, upsetting many of the forum's users.



Capacity to carry out an attack

Determine whether the student's thinking and behavior is organized enough to plan and execute an attack and whether the student has the resources to carry it out.

Planning does not need to be elaborate and could be as simple as taking a weapon from home and inflicting harm on classmates at school. Other student attackers may develop more complex and lengthier plans. At the very least, carrying out an attack requires that the student has access to a weapon and the ability to get that weapon to school undetected.

On January 14, 2014, a 12-year-old male student used a shotgun with a sawed-off stock to fire three rounds of birdshot at fellow students gathered in their middle school gymnasium prior to the start of the school day. He injured two students and a security guard before surrendering to a teacher. The student began talking about his attack plans as early as November 2013, saying that he wanted to fire a weapon in the air to make people take him seriously. According to reports, his father owned a pistol and a shotgun. In January 2014, the student wrote in his diary that he wanted to use his father's pistol for his attack, but was unable to locate it so he used the shotgun instead. The morning of the attack, the student was driven to school by a family member so he hid his shotgun in a duffel bag, claiming it contained items for his gym class.

Planning

Targeted attacks at school are **rarely sudden or impulsive** acts of violence. The Team should assess whether the student has made specific plans to harm the school. The student might create lists of individuals or groups targeted for violence, or research tactics and materials needed to carry out the attack. The student may conduct surveillance, draw maps of the planned location, and test security responses at school. He/she may write out detailed steps and rehearse some aspects of a plan, such as getting to the school, the timing of the attack, or whether to attempt escape, be captured, or commit suicide. The student may also acquire, manufacture, or practice with a weapon.

On December 13, 2013, an 18-year-old male student entered his high school with a shotgun, a large knife, bandoliers with ammunition, and a number of homemade Molotov cocktails. He opened fire on two female students, fatally shooting one. He then entered the school library and opened fire on a faculty member there, who was able to escape through a back door. The student then set fire to a shelf of books in the library with one of his Molotov cocktails before fatally shooting himself. The student spent three months planning his attack, starting a diary on his computer in September 2013 to detail his plans. There he wrote that he wanted to choose a day during final exams so that the largest number of students would be present. Over the next few months, he planned how and where he would enter the school, including where he would initiate the attack, and purchased the firearm and ammunition he would use. On the morning of the incident, the student purchased a four-pack of glass soda bottles and used these to create the Molotov cocktails he deployed during the attack.

Step 5 continued.

Establish assessment procedures, *Investigative themes*

Consistency

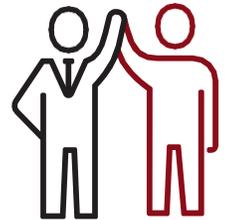
The Team should **corroborate the student's statements** to determine that they are consistent with the student's actions and behaviors and with what other people say about the student. When inconsistencies are identified, the Team should then try to determine why that is the case. For example, the student might say that he/she is handling a romantic break-up well, but posts on social media indicate the student is struggling to move on, and friends report that the student is more upset or angry about the break-up than reported. Determine whether the inconsistency is because the student is deliberately hiding something or if the inconsistency stems from another underlying issue. For example, a depressed student may claim that they are isolated, even if they regularly go out with a large group of students. If the inconsistency is deliberate, it is important to determine why the student feels the need to conceal his/her actions. The concealment may be as simple as a fear of facing punishment for some other inappropriate behavior, or it may be related to hidden plans for a violent act.

On June 10, 2014, a 15-year-old male student brought a rifle, handgun, nine magazines with ammunition, and a knife into the boy's locker room at his high school. He had taken the weapons from his brother's locked gun case in his home. Once at school, he changed into all black clothing, and donned a helmet, face mask, and a non-ballistic vest. He then fatally shot one student and wounded a teacher. After being confronted by staff and law enforcement, the student fatally shot himself in a bathroom. Prior to his attack, the student was an ordained deacon at his church and was appointed president of the deacon's quorum. He participated in youth night at the church, Boy Scouts, youth basketball, and track. Friends described him as friendly and outgoing. He was also a member of the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps

(JROTC) and was fascinated with guns and the military. Despite his outward appearance, some time prior to his attack, he wrote in a journal about his plans to kill his classmates and spoke harshly about "sinners," which included people who smoked cigarettes and took the Lord's name in vain.

Protective factors

A thorough threat assessment requires understanding the full picture of a student's behaviors and environment, which also includes accounting for the positive and prosocial influences on the student's life. The Team should identify factors that may restore hope to a student who feels defeated, desperate, or in a situation that is impossible to overcome. This includes determining whether the student has a **positive, trusting relationship with an adult at school**. This could be a teacher, coach, guidance counselor, administrator, nurse, resource officer, or janitor. A trusted adult at school in whom the student can confide and who will listen without judgment can help direct a student toward resources, supports, and options to overcome setbacks. Learn who the student's friends are at school and if the student feels **emotionally connected to other students**. A student may need help developing friendships that they can rely on for support.



Positive situational or personal factors might help deter a student from engaging in negative or harmful behaviors. Changes in a student's life, such as having a new romantic relationship or becoming a member of a team or club, might discourage any plan to engage in Violence. The Team could also use activities or groups the student wants to take part in as motivation for the student to engage in positive and constructive behaviors, such as attending class, completing assignments, and adhering to a conduct or behavior code.

Step 6.

Develop risk management options

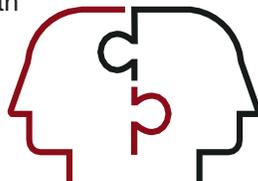
Once the Team has completed a thorough assessment of the student, it can **evaluate whether the student is at risk for self-harm or harming someone else** at school. Concern may be heightened if the student is struggling emotionally, having trouble overcoming setbacks or losses, feeling hopeless, preoccupied with others who engaged in violence to solve problems, or has access to weapons. Remember, the Team is not attempting to predict with certainty if violence will happen. Instead, evaluate the presence of factors that indicate violence might be a possibility. Teams can then **develop risk management strategies that reduce the student's risk for engaging in violence** and make positive outcomes for the student more likely.

- Each student who comes to the Team's attention will require an **individualized management plan**. The resources and supports the student needs will differ depending on the information gathered during the assessment.
- Often, the Team will determine that the student is not currently at risk for engaging in violence, but **requires monitoring or is in need of guidance** to cope with losses, develop resiliency to overcome setbacks, or learn more appropriate strategies to manage emotions.
- **Resources to assist the student** could take the form of peer support programs or therapeutic counseling to enhance social learning or emotional competency, life skills classes, tutoring in specific academic subjects, or mental health care. Most programs and supports will be available within the school, but the Team may need to also access community resources to assist with managing the student.

- Sometimes management involves suspension or expulsion from school. When this is necessary, Teams and school administrators should consider how it might affect their ability to monitor the student. **Removing a student from school does not eliminate the risk to the school community**. Several school attacks have been carried out by former students who had been removed from the school or aged out of their former school. A suspended or expelled student might become isolated from positive peer interactions or supportive adult relationships at school. Teams should develop strategies to stay connected to the suspended or expelled student to determine whether the student's situation is deteriorating or the behaviors of concern are escalating so that they can respond appropriately.

Management plans should remain in place until the Team is no longer concerned about the student or the risk for violence. This is accomplished by addressing the following basic elements that can reduce the likelihood a student will engage in violence and provide support and resources for those in need.

- **Notify law enforcement immediately if a student is thinking about or planning to engage in violence**, so that they may assist in managing the situation.
- **Make efforts to address the safety of any potential targets** by altering or improving security procedures for schools or individuals and providing guidance on how to avoid the student of concern.



Step 6 continued.

Develop risk management options

- **Create a situation that is less prone to violence** by asking the family or law enforcement to block the student's access to weapons, while also connecting the student to positive, prosocial models of behavior. Another option may involve removing the student from campus for a period of time, while maintaining a relationship with the student and the student's family.
- **Remove or redirect the student's motive.** Every student's motive will be different, and motives can be redirected in a variety of ways. These strategies may include bullying prevention efforts or offering counseling for a student experiencing a personal setback.
- **Reduce the effect of stressors** by providing resources and supports that help the student manage and overcome negative events, setbacks, and challenges.

In one recent case, a school principal described a situation when a student was suspended from his high school for drug possession. Soon after, a fellow student discovered a concerning video he posted online and notified school personnel. A school administrator met with the student and his father. While the administrator had no immediate safety concerns about the student, he was aware that the student was experiencing a number of stressors. The student's parents were divorced and he was living with his father, who was diagnosed with a terminal illness and was receiving frequent medical treatments. His mother was dealing with a mental illness, was a source of embarrassment to him, and was unlikely to be able to serve as his guardian after his father's passing. He was also recently removed from the wrestling team, and due to his suspension, banned from attending the matches. While suspended, the student was required to attend tutoring sessions in lieu of school, but was unable to make his sessions because he was transporting his father to medical appointments. The administrator reported that he would have alerted their school resource officer and local sheriff's office if he had safety concerns about the student, but instead the school worked with community services to provide access to resources and supports, including transportation services for his father to his medical appointments so the student could attend tutoring sessions, and counseling and support services that would assist the student after his father's passing. The school also worked with the student and his father to develop a plan for the student to return to campus and remain on track to graduate.

Step 7.

Create and promote safe school climates

A crucial component of preventing targeted violence at schools relies on developing positive school climates **built on a culture of safety, respect, trust, and social and emotional support**. Teachers and staff in safe school environments support diversity, encourage communication between faculty and students, intervene in conflicts, and work to prevent teasing and bullying. Students in safe school climates feel empowered to **share concerns with adults**, without feeling ashamed or facing the stigma of being labeled a “snitch.” Administrators can take action to develop and sustain safe school climates.

- Help students feel connected to the school, their classmates, and teachers. This is an important first step to creating school climates that are supportive, respectful, and safe. **Encourage teachers and staff to build positive, trusting relationships with students** by actively listening to students and taking an interest in what they say.
- **Break down “codes of silence”** and help students feel empowered to come forward and share concerns and problems with a trusted adult. At one school, administrators used a faculty meeting to identify students who lacked a solid connection with an adult at school. They provided faculty with a roster of enrolled students and asked them to place a mark next to students with whom they had a warm relationship. For students without a mark next to their name, popular, well-liked teachers and staff were asked to reach out and develop positive connections with them.
- Help students feel more **connected to their classmates and the school**. One teacher asked her elementary students to write down names of classmates they wanted to sit next to. If a student’s name did not appear on anyone’s list, the teacher placed that student’s desk next to a friendly or outgoing classmate in an effort to help the student develop friendships. This effort could be easily adapted with middle or high school-aged students by asking students to identify one or two classmates they would like to be partnered with for a project and assigning any student not named on a list to be partnered with a friendly or outgoing classmate.
- Adults can also help students **identify clubs or teams at school** they can join or encourage them to start their own special interest group.



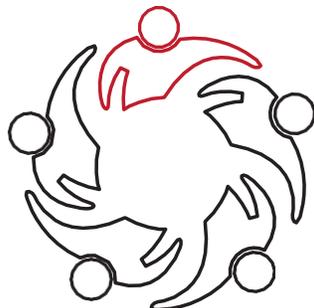
Step 7 continued.

Create and promote safe school climates

Schools can also support positive school climates by implementing school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs. These programs actively teach students what appropriate behavior looks like in a variety of settings, including in the classroom, with their friends, or among adults. Teachers frequently praise prosocial behavior they observe and encourage students' good behavior. PBIS can improve academic outcomes for schools and has been shown to reduce the rates of school bullying.⁴

While teachers and staff can foster relationships and connectedness among the student body, **students themselves have a role to play** in sustaining safe school climates. They should be actively engaged in their schools, encouraged to reach out to classmates who might be lonely or isolated, and empowered to intervene safely when they witness gossiping, teasing, and bullying.

Following an averted attack at a high school, the school principal sent a note home to students and parents about the incident. He used the note to explain what had been reported, the steps the school had taken to avert the attack, and praise for the students who had alerted school officials about concerning and threatening statements they saw online. In the note, he also asked parents to encourage their students to speak up if they ever felt concerned about a classmate's behavior, explaining that students' "cooperation [with school officials] is important for everybody's safety."



⁴ Lee, A.M.I. (n.d.). PBIS: How schools can support positive behavior. Understood.org. Retrieved on April 5, 2018, from <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/pbis-how-schools-support-positive-behavior>.

“ School safety is everyone’s responsibility.”

Step 8. Conduct training for all stakeholders

The final component of a comprehensive targeted violence prevention plan is to identify training needs for all stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and administrators; students; parents; and school resource officers or local law enforcement. **School safety is everyone’s responsibility.** Anyone who could come forward with concerning information or who might be involved in the assessment process should be provided with training. Effective training addresses the goals and steps of an assessment, the type of information that should be brought forward, and how individuals can report their concerns. It might be beneficial for staff and students to hear presentations, see videos, and role-play scenarios so they have a thorough understanding of their responsibilities and the steps they can take to keep their school safe. Each audience will require a slightly different message, but some stakeholders may also benefit from attending training together, such as parents and students, or school faculty/staff and law enforcement personnel. When developing a training program, consider how frequently each stakeholder will receive training, and whether to vary the delivery method of trainings. Also, each audience may have unique needs.

Faculty, staff, and administrators. Every adult at school needs training related to threat assessment and violence prevention, **including administrative, maintenance, custodial, and food service staff.** Training can include who should be notified when concerning or threatening information is discovered, what information should be brought forward, how school staff might learn about information, and the steps school staff can take to safely intervene with concerning or threatening situations. Providing training on other topics, such as suicide awareness and prevention, conflict resolution, mental health, and developmental disabilities, might also allow school faculty, staff, and administrators to foster positive school climates.

Students. Students need training on the threat assessment process, where to report concerns, and what information they should bring forward. Students also need assurances that they can make a report to the Team or another trusted adult **anonymously**, that their information will be **followed-up on**, and will be kept **confidential**. Training can also educate students about other actionable steps they can take to cultivate a safe school climate, including ways they can safely intervene with bullying, gossip, or name-calling.

Messaging should demonstrate to students that there is a big **difference between “snitching,” “ratting,” or “tattling,” and seeking help.** While snitching is informing on someone for personal gain, here, students are encouraged to come forward when they are worried about a friend who is struggling, or when they are trying to keep someone from getting hurt. Remind students that if they are concerned about a classmate or friend, they need to keep speaking out until that person gets the help they need. Finally, maintaining a safe school climate includes providing students with training or lessons to acquire skills and abilities to manage emotions, resolve conflicts, cope with stress, seek help, and engage in positive social interactions.

Who needs training?

- Teachers, staff, administrators
- Parents
- Students
- Law enforcement
- All of the above

Step 8 continued.

Conduct training for all stakeholders

Parents. Parents should also be trained on the threat assessment process at their child’s school and their role in that process. **They should be clear on who to call, when, and what information they should be ready to provide.** Parents can also benefit from training that helps them recognize when children and teenagers may be in emotional trouble or feeling socially isolated. Training can also reduce the stigma around mental, emotional, or developmental issues and provide information on available resources and when they should seek professional assistance.

Law enforcement and school resource officers. Not every school will have a school resource officer, but schools can still **develop relationships with local law enforcement** agencies and personnel. Schools can encourage local officers to co-teach classes at the school, serve as coaches or assistant coaches of sports teams, and work with parents and teachers at after-school events. In some communities without school resource officers, local law enforcement

agencies have encouraged officers to “adopt a school,” stopping by the school to greet and become familiar with students and teachers, eating lunch on campus, or doing paperwork in an office at the school.

Like parents and teachers, local law enforcement and school resource officers need to be aware of the school’s threat assessment process and their own responsibilities once a threat is identified. Training for law enforcement and school resource officers should also provide familiarity with emergency response procedures the school has in place and the layout of the campus. Officers and school staff might benefit from attending training together so that all parties are aware of the point at which local law enforcement should be involved in an investigation. This would also allow officers to get to know administrators, teachers, counselors, facilities and maintenance personnel, and other school staff. It is much easier to work through an emergency situation when schools and law enforcement are already familiar with each other and their procedures.

CONCLUSION

Despite having a comprehensive targeted violence prevention plan in place, and despite a school and Team's best efforts at prevention, incidents of targeted school violence may still occur. It is critical to **develop and implement emergency response plans and procedures** and provide training on them to all stakeholders. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security recommends that emergency response plans be developed with input from local law enforcement and first responders.⁵ For example, procedures should be developed for reporting emergencies, evacuation procedures and routes, use of emergency notification systems, and information regarding local hospitals or trauma centers. Law enforcement and first responders should be apprised of these plans and procedures and know how to implement them.

⁵ U.S. Department Homeland Security. (October 2008). Active Shooter: How to Respond. Homeland Security Active Shooter Preparedness. Retrieved on May 29, 2018, from https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active_shooter_booklet.pdf. Interagency Security Committee. (November 2015). Planning and Response to an Active Shooter: An Interagency Security Committee Policy and Best Practices Guide. Homeland Security Active Shooter Preparedness. Retrieved on May 29, 2018, from <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/isc-planning-response-active-shooter-guide-non-fouo-nov-2015-508.pdf>.

“Everyone
has a
role...”

Everyone has a role in preventing school violence and creating safe school climates. The **threat assessment procedures detailed in this guide are an important component of school safety and security efforts** and have been determined to be the best-practice in the prevention of targeted school violence. The model highlights that students can engage in a continuum of concerning behaviors and communications, the vast majority of which may not be threatening or violent. Nevertheless, it encourages schools to set a low threshold when identifying students who might be engaging in unusual behavior, or experiencing distress, so that early interventions can be applied to reduce the risk of violence or other negative outcomes.

Threat Assessment



Active Incident Response

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS

This section provides information and links to resources that can help schools create threat assessment teams, establish central reporting mechanisms, train stakeholders on assessment procedures, and promote safe school climates. It also provides links to resources related to emergency planning, responses to violence, and mental health. The U.S. Secret Service provides the listed non-government resources as a public service only. The U.S. government neither endorses nor guarantees in any way the external organizations, services, advice, or products included in this list. Furthermore, the U.S. government neither controls nor guarantees the accuracy, relevance, timeliness or completeness of the information contained in non-government websites.⁶

Threat assessment

THE NATIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER (NTAC). Provides links to best-practices in threat assessment and the prevention of targeted violence, including resources on conducting threat assessments in K-12 schools, building positive school climates, and requesting training from NTAC personnel.

<https://www.secretservice.gov/protection/ntac/>

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS (NASP). Provides information and links to research on conducting threat assessments in K-12 schools.

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/threat-assessment-at-school/threat-assessment-for-school-administrators-and-crisis-teams>

THE NATIONAL BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION TEAM ASSOCIATION (NABITA). Provides education, resources, and supports to campus behavioral intervention team personnel and those who work to provide caring interventions of at-risk individuals.

<https://nabita.org/>

THE VIRGINIA STUDENT THREAT ASSESSMENT MODEL. Provides guidelines and resources for schools to conduct threat assessments of students, including links to research on threat assessment.

<https://curry.virginia.edu/faculty-research/centers-labs-projects/research-labs/youth-violence-project/virginia-student-threat>

⁶The provided links were active at the time of the publication of this guide. Organizations may have updated or changed their links since this guide was published.

School safety and violence prevention

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (NEA). Provides resources, reports, and information about school safety and violence prevention.

<http://www.nea.org/home/16364.htm>

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE, YOUTH FOCUSED POLICING (YFP). Provides information, resources, and training to enable law enforcement to work and intervene with children, teens, and young adults. Resources focus on reducing crimes and victimization among youth populations.

<http://www.iacpyouth.org/>

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS (NASRO). Provides training, information, and resources to school-based law enforcement officers.

<https://nasro.org/>

NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS TECHNOLOGY CENTER, SCHOOL SAFETY RESOURCES. Provides links to resources and information, including training material, computer software, and videos for law enforcement officers who work in K-12 schools.

https://www.justnet.org/school_safety.html

CENTER FOR THE STUDY AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE (CSPV). Conducts research and provides support to professionals implementing evidence-based programs that promote positive youth development, reduce problem behaviors, and prevent violence and other antisocial behaviors.

<https://www.colorado.edu/cspv/>

THE TEXAS SCHOOL SAFETY CENTER (TXSSC). Provides information and resources related to bullying, school violence, drugs and tobacco, technology safety, and emergency management.

<https://txssc.txstate.edu/>

SCHOOL SAFETY ADVOCACY COUNCIL (SSAC). Provides school safety training and services to school districts, law enforcement organizations, and communities. Provides links to grant opportunities, training courses, and conferences.

<http://www.schoolsafety911.org/index.html>

Emergency management and response to school violence

READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS (REMS) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER. National clearing-house for school safety information. Provides resources, training, and information related to violence prevention, response, and recovery from incidents of school violence.

<https://rems.ed.gov/>

GUIDE FOR PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO SCHOOL VIOLENCE. Provides strategies to consider when creating safe learning environments and considers the full range of possible violence that can occur in schools.

<http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/pdfs/schoolviolence2.pdf>

Creating safe and positive school climates

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE AND DISCIPLINE. Resource guide developed by the U.S. Department of Education for schools to create nurturing, positive, and safe environments to help boost student achievement and success.

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>

SCHOOLS SECURITY TASK FORCE, WHAT MAKES SCHOOLS SAFE? Publication by the New Jersey School Boards Association to provide guidance and direction on school safety issues. The final report provides recommendations and resources to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of students.

<https://www.njsba.org/news-information/research/school-security-task-force/>

POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS (PBIS). Clearinghouse and technical assistance center that supports schools, school districts, and state agencies to create and implement a multi-tiered approach to social, emotional, and behavioral support. Provides links to resources, information, and training on PBIS tools and strategies.

<https://www.pbis.org/>

Prevention and intervention of bullying

STOPBULLYING.GOV. Provides information from government agencies on bullying, cyberbullying, risk factors, responses to bullying, and prevention efforts.

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/>

NATIONAL PTA. Provides resources regarding bullying prevention and creating positive school climates.

<https://www.pta.org/home/programs/Connect-for-RespectBullying>

YOUTH VIOLENCE PROJECT, BULLYING RESOURCES. Provides an aggregate of online and in-print resources for parents, teachers, and students to intervene, prevent, and respond to bullying.

<https://curry.virginia.edu/faculty-research/centers-labs-projects/research-labs/youth-violence-project/bullying/bullying-0>

Mental health

NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS (NAMI). NAMI is dedicated to assisting those affected by mental illness and their families. They provide information specific to conditions and symptoms experienced by teens and young adults, as well as resources for education and advocacy for all those who suffer from mental health symptoms.

<https://www.nami.org/>

<https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Teens-and-Young-Adults>

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH (NIMH). Provides links to resources for assistance with mental health and mental illness, information related to mental health symptoms and disorders, and outreach to various stakeholders.

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help/index.shtml>

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID. Provides resources for free and low-cost training on mental health, symptoms of mental illness, and intervening with those with mental health symptoms.

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>



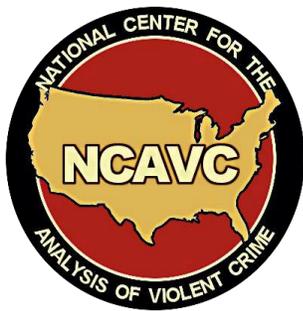
*U.S. Department of
Homeland Security*

**United States
Secret Service**



Making Prevention a Reality:

Identifying, Assessing, and Managing the
Threat of Targeted Attacks



Behavioral Threat Assessment Center

National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime

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Message from the FBI Director

Every day in America, acts of planned violence are carried out against innocent people simply going about their lives. The mass shootings we see so frequently today are a dramatic example. I know many Americans feel that no place is safe – schools, places of worship, worksites, or public gatherings. Fear like that can become disabling, and that is no way to live.

The FBI is committed to making our country safer by finding ways to reduce attacks like mass shootings, and other forms of targeted violence such as stalking, terrorism, or ambush attacks on law enforcement. For years, the FBI and other law enforcement agencies, academic researchers, mental health experts, and the news media have studied this problem. In 2015, the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit brought together a multidisciplinary group of experts to collaborate on solutions.

This monograph represents the collective experiences and insights of the Behavioral Analysis Unit and these experts. We hope it serves as a practical guide to threat assessment and management. It is intended for novice and experienced professionals alike, and I believe it offers something for all of us who are paid to investigate and stop such acts of violence. The best way to counter any threat is to combine knowledge, experience, and cooperation with our partners. We must all work as a team.

I am grateful to all those who helped create this guide for their time, their expertise, and their commitment to public safety. I hope this helps you better understand and ultimately prevent targeted acts of violence in your communities. Thank you for making the choice to do good for a living and for serving the people of this great country.

James B. Comey
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Foreword

The FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) is part of the Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG) located at the FBI Academy at Quantico, Virginia, and consists of FBI Special Agents and professional support staff, and representatives from other federal agencies and departments. The NCAVC provides operational support in the areas of counterterrorism, counterintelligence, cyber-crimes, crimes against children, crimes against adults, and threat assessment. The Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC) is the NCAVC's center of expertise for threat assessment and management. Cases accepted by the BTAC often include post-incident analysis of completed attacks; "person of concern" cases in school, workplace and other contexts; stalking; threats and extortion; and other forms of planned violence.

The BTAC reviews cases from behavioral, investigative, and legal perspectives, offering a range of services for law enforcement agencies around the country and the world. Services include behavioral threat assessments and management strategies, interview strategies, prosecutorial strategies, on-site deployments to assist with investigations of completed attacks, and more. Products generated by the BTAC serve as operational tools for client law enforcement agencies to help them effectively prioritize resources and plan investigative and violence prevention strategies. The BTAC also conducts research into targeted violence from a law enforcement perspective in an effort to gain insight into criminal thought processes, motivations, and behaviors. Results of this research are shared with law enforcement and academic communities through publications, presentations, and training, as well as through application of knowledge to the investigative and operational functions of the BTAC.

Assistance of the BTAC can be requested by law enforcement agencies. They may request it through one of the FBI's 56 domestic FBI field offices or 64 legal attaché offices in US embassies around the world, in furtherance of their own investigations or in responding to a request by a community, school, employer, or other entity. One goal of this guide is to educate and empower communities to address some of these issues independently.

The BTAC, working with experts in targeted violence and threat assessment and looking at the active shooter problem from a law enforcement and behavioral perspective, wanted to examine promising strategies for preventing these attacks. From July 26 to 28, 2015, the BTAC hosted a symposium at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia. A collaborative group consisting of representatives from law enforcement, academia, law, and mental health, along with members of the BTAC and the NCAVC, came together to share expertise and experiences on this important issue.

The agenda included presentations and working group sessions on relevant topics in the field of threat management. This monograph is the culmination of those efforts, outlining consensus views and offering BTAC experiences with recommended practices in a field that is evolving. It is hoped this monograph will serve as a useful and practical guide for understanding and implementing threat assessment and management at all levels.

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Introduction

Traditional law enforcement techniques historically have focused on the apprehension and prosecution of violent offenders *after* violent crimes are committed. When police are given information that someone may potentially commit a crime or become violent in the future, their responsibilities, authorities, and available investigative tools are suddenly less clear. This guide is about threat assessment and management, or stated another way, *how law enforcement officers and others may identify, assess, and manage the risk of future, planned violence*. This task is a complex and nuanced one. Published research about intended violence and its perpetrators, along with knowledge and experience derived from previous cases, are applied to the facts and circumstances of each case. In other words, there is a lot to think about.

The FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) held a symposium in mid-2015, bringing together academic researchers, mental health experts, and law enforcement practitioners of threat assessment to discuss the active shooter phenomenon. Specifically, symposium participants focused on prevention strategies with regard to this crime problem. By far the most valuable prevention strategy identified was the threat assessment and management team. The good news is that every organization and community has the potential to stand up or access such a team. The intent of this publication is, therefore, to provide desperately needed guidance on making this a reality for every community based upon a consensus of recommendations in an evolving field. Recommendations are offered about this process in very practical terms. It is not intended as an academic textbook but rather as a hands-on guide for novice and experienced threat assessment practitioners alike.

The first and most fundamental potential barrier to engagement is lack of knowledge—knowledge about threat assessment and management itself, about risk factors and warning signs, about what goes into managing potential threats. This knowledge is a key to implementing viable strategies to reduce targeted violence. Without it, prevention efforts are far less effective because they may then be guided by assumption and fear of the unknown, rather than knowledge and experience. This guide provides some of the information needed for creating teams and engaging in the business of threat assessment and management. It is derived from published research and the collective experience of the BAU and other experts.

This guide first addresses some important awareness aspects of the active shooter problem, not the least of which is the term “active shooter.” The content of this publication does not begin and end with active shooters, but instead applies to targeted violence generally. However, it does not specifically address potential acts of terrorism, or threat assessment for violence perpetrated primarily in furtherance of a political, religious, or other extremist cause or ideology. Planned violence, threat assessments, violence and mental health, and barriers to successful prevention efforts are also discussed. The guide then offers specific and actionable information on identifying, assessing, and managing persons who pose a true concern for planned, targeted violence. Guidance about setting up and running a threat management team is offered. Sample tools are provided in the appendices.

Additionally, this guide is context-neutral, and can be applied to educational, workplace, and other situations.

Prevention *is not and cannot* be a passive process. It requires a strong and overt commitment by organizations and communities to prioritizing public safety and caretaking for those in need. This is manifested by adoption of policies and programs to support targeted violence prevention efforts, establishment of threat assessment and management teams, and education to underscore the importance of these processes and to promote acceptance and engagement by all.

Chapter 1 Awareness: Initial Step Toward Change

Violence is gender neutral

Those responsible for threat assessment and management should recognize that both male and female persons of concern for targeted violence will come to their attention. There may be a tendency for stakeholders to view the potential threat posed by females as less worrisome, e.g. dismissing threatening writings by females as mere fantasy or attention-seeking material. The BAU strongly cautions against this approach, and recommends safety stakeholders not dismiss female persons of concern as nonthreatening based upon statistics supporting the idea that males are more likely to offend in this way. Targeted violence is a highly individualized crime based upon highly individualized and unique motivators.

For ease of reading, however, only male gender pronouns are used in this publication in reference to single individuals.

Diminishing the violent offender

While it can be difficult or even impossible to truly understand, for some people there is an aura of power or cultural fascination surrounding shooting attacks. It attracts and encourages certain troubled individuals, helping to propel them along their paths toward intended violence. This aura can be projected by an offender in a pre-recorded video manifesto or during an attack, or it may be an interpretation by the reader of an online statement posted immediately after an incident. The dominance of 24/7 media coverage, networks and internet sites competing with each other for viewers, and even our own fascination as a society perpetuates this and allows it to grow and evolve.

Before case-specific prevention efforts even begin, the problem of glorification of these events should be addressed. First and foremost, the words society as a whole uses to describe both the phenomenon and the attackers are fostering this mystique. Terms like “active shooter,” “lone wolf,” or any others that romanticize and idealize these offenders, should be deemphasized. Such words and phrases project power and sensationalize predatory violence. Instead, describing an attack as an incident or shooting incident, and the attacker as an assailant or offender, is strongly recommended as a means of denying legacy establishment to these violent criminals. Extensive media coverage featuring the offenders’ names, photos and life stories only cements the legacies they seek to achieve. It may never be possible to pinpoint primary influences on individual decisions to attack, particularly in cases where an offender does not survive the incident. Highly personal factors are dominant motivators; however, some inspiration may also derive from intensive and available coverage of past acts and actors.

A shooting incident, once sensationalized in the media, can live on for years in full color and sound, at a keystroke. A change in the way these events are reported and talked about may diminish

this phenomenon. The term active shooter^a should be dropped from our cultural narrative. News media should refrain from naming the assailants, from posting their photographs, videos and communications, and from publishing detailed investigations into their lives and motives.

This guide will adopt that posture and refrain from using sensationalizing descriptors.

These offenders don't "snap"—they decide

Violence can be categorized in one of two ways: predatory/planned or impulsive/reactive. Predatory/planned violence is premeditated and serves some purpose for those who plan and conduct violent attacks. Impulsive/reactive violence, on the other hand, is emotional and impromptu; it is frequently a defensive behavior in response to a perceived imminent threat. These two types of violence are distinctly different. Clinical and forensic data on adult and adolescent mass murder, the type of violence this guide is concerned with, will reveal that virtually all of these acts are premeditated, rather than impulsive, violence. Two obvious signs indicate this is so: the planning and preparation for days, weeks, or months, sometimes recorded by these offenders and often observed by others, and the utter lack of emotion witnessed by survivors while the perpetrators committed their crimes.¹

Targeted mass attacks are just that—"targeted." Forethought and planning go into the attack. These are not spontaneous, emotion-driven, impulsive crimes emanating from a person's immediate anger or fear. In fact there is no evidence in the research to date that "snap" mass murders occur at all.² The perpetrators often have a grievance and they take time to consider, plan, and prepare their attack. This is one advantage that threat assessment teams have—preparing to engage in violence almost always requires time and action, which in turn allows for opportunities for bystander observation and reporting. This will be discussed further below.

Threat assessment

Threat assessment is a systematic, fact-based method of investigation and examination that blends the collection and analysis of multiple sources of information with published research and practitioner experience, focusing on an individual's patterns of thinking and behavior to determine whether, and to what extent, a person of concern is moving toward an attack. A threat assessment is not a final product, but the beginning of the management process. It guides a course of action to mitigate a threat of potential violence; merely identifying that someone is of moderate or higher concern, without developing a management strategy, does not complete this process and is not recommended.

When a person of concern has been brought to the attention of safety stakeholders, it is essential to engage as early as possible in the assessment and management process. By the time crisis-stage management is reached, likely solutions run the risk of being "knee jerk" rather than measured

^a The BAU acknowledges this term has a valid, descriptive meaning for responding law enforcement officers and safety personnel. It lets responders know that an offender may be a continuing threat of gun violence, which activates a particularized response and set of tactics by law enforcement. The BAU understands the value in retaining this term as an internal, law enforcement phrase for operational use.

and thoughtful, with past, present and future in mind. By engaging in the assessment and management process as soon as a person of concern is identified, threat managers are more likely to succeed in preventing a violent outcome. Steering a person in a different direction early on may mean offering assistance to someone who needs it before that person concludes violence is necessary.

Research

Scientific research and lessons learned from completed acts of targeted violence have added significantly to the body of knowledge about who commits it and why, what warning signs may be evident, and more. This increase in knowledge suggests that law enforcement agencies and other entities may consider developing methods to address threats of violence by persons of concern from a prevention standpoint, where feasible. Guidance is available from various sources to institutions and organizations that need to develop policies and procedures aimed at violence prevention. Research-based data are becoming increasingly available to assist in assessing violence risk within the context of mental health assessment. Foundational studies such as the Exceptional Case Study Project³ and the Safe School Initiative⁴ addressed targeted violence. Though they have been advanced by a significant body of additional research and thought, their key findings remain core to this discipline. Both studies focused on the thinking and behavior of planned violence offenders leading up to their crimes. They found most offenders did not threaten their targets directly, but prior to the incidents they displayed identifiable behaviors reflecting potentially violent intent. These conclusions support using an evidence-based approach to assess persons of concern by evaluating behaviors in order to determine the appropriate level of concern.

Invaluable resource materials derived from research and experience are publicly available, such as those identified in Appendix F. These resources, largely used to create this guide, lay the framework and build a convincing case for public and private entities to incorporate the threat assessment and management process for gathering, assessing and managing concerning persons and situations via strategies for preventing targeted violence.

In addition to qualitative and quantitative research, targeted violence incidents themselves represent an additional and invaluable source of knowledge and experience for threat assessment practitioners and policymakers alike. For example, as a result of the 2007 tragedy at Virginia Polytechnic University, the Virginia legislature passed measures resulting in an improved emergency evaluation process in that state, modified criteria for involuntary commitment, tightened procedures for mandatory outpatient treatment, increased state funding for community mental health services, requirements for better collaboration between the courts and the services system, and the establishment of data systems for monitoring and oversight of the commitment process.⁵ This tragic incident also provided learning material for threat assessment professionals regarding risk factors and missed warning signs, losses of opportunity to intervene, the violent behaviors themselves, and more. With every incident, lessons are learned.

The symposium participants' intentions and hopes for this guide are to summarize much of this knowledge for organizations and communities, in furtherance of a goal of standing up teams and processes to manage threats of planned violence.

Barriers to successful engagement

Entities identified below all potentially play a role in threat assessment and management. They may encounter or inadvertently cause barriers to successful engagement. Threat management is about diverting dangerous and concerning behaviors away from a course that would ultimately lead to an act of targeted violence, and any person or organization interacting with a person of concern can impact the course of events. As a proactive measure when faced with a person of concern, referral of the matter to a local threat management team is always a good choice, and is at minimum preferable to doing nothing.

- Law enforcement: Most uniformed law enforcement organizations are stretched thin as it is. It can be difficult to devote resources to preventing something that may or may not happen. Law enforcement agencies, their officers and agents, and leaders may consider becoming versed in preemptive measures to prevent violence to the extent practicable for each agency and community. Awareness can be developed about threat assessment and how it fits into daily operations.
- Prosecution: Prosecutorial discretion and ingenuity are highly effective tools in threat management, and their use is encouraged. Even low-level cases may be worthy of pursuit in order to hold a person of concern accountable; another goal may be to deter violent behavior. Prosecutorial agencies should view themselves as part of the solution.
- Schools: Schools are responsible for maintaining a safe and positive learning environment for all students. The desire to avoid conflict or trouble can unnecessarily create obstacles and ultimately do disservice to persons of concern and to the general population at a school. Information should be shared with threat managers where permissible, and schools should be part of threat management solutions.
- Social services: These agencies address needs and facilitate access to services for at-risk individuals and families; they also engage at the community level to improve lives. The social services system may be more overburdened than any other in the overall threat management process, which creates serious challenges for it in performing its functions in a safe and effective manner. Social services can offer invaluable resources in the quest for successful threat management; the impact of these resources can be enhanced via co-deployments with other components of the team and by referring problematic issues for collaborative engagement.
- Health care systems and providers: The health care system is similarly overburdened, which creates challenges related to evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of at-risk individuals. Ideally, health care workers at all levels might develop awareness about threat assessment and how violence and

mental illness intersect. They should be open to sharing information with threat managers when privacy laws permit sharing, and in all cases be receptive to receiving information from law enforcement and others to help inform their own clinical judgments.

- Lawmakers: Members of legislative bodies have the responsibility for solving problems left by gaps in the law; unfortunately, these gaps are many and varied. These are not simple issues with obvious, single solutions. It is recommended that lawmakers remain mindful that statistics rarely provide proof of successful prevention; only tragedies make the headlines, whereas successful prevention efforts are difficult to measure. Regardless, prevention programs require resources. Legislators are positioned to assist with providing needed resources to threat management programs.
- Courts: Among many other responsibilities, the courts have power to issue orders for incarceration and other restrictions on freedom, mental health evaluations and treatment, and more. The influence and power of the court extends from the infancy of a case until well beyond its conclusion. It is recommended that courts achieve fluency with mental health issues, particularly where violence is concerned. Courts are encouraged to think of judicial discretion as an effective threat management tool; using every available tool could be a step toward preventing tragedy.
- Probation and Parole: Probation and parole agencies can directly impact threat management cases in their unique positions of observation and control over a person of concern. Violations of conditions may be indicative of a greater problem. Probation and parole departments may consider obtaining training on risk factors, warning behaviors, and mitigators so they can recognize these signs and understand what bigger picture may be forming when violations occur. These agencies should be part of the threat management team on any case where they oversee a person of concern.
- Employers: Persons of concern spend perhaps as much time at work as they do anywhere else; colleagues and leadership are uniquely positioned to observe and be impacted by a person of concern. Discipline and dismissals, violence prevention policies, encouraging bystander reporting and more, all affect how an employer manages threats of violence; none of these issues are simple or easy to navigate. One issue of particular significance is that former employees can still pose a threat to the workplace or community at large after they no longer work or live in a particular location. In order to plan forward-thinking management strategies when needed, employers are encouraged to either create or participate in threat management teams, or fully cooperate with inquiries by threat managers.
- Parents and immediate family: In many circumstances, parents may have the best optic on a person of concern's struggles and vulnerabilities, especially if the person lives at home with them. In some cases, parents or other family members may tend to "circle the wagons" around a minor child and avoid cooperation with mental health recommendations, school concerns, social services assistance, and law enforcement inquiry. Although often difficult, it is important for parents to remain open to assistance and guidance when it is needed to address concerning behavior or mental health issues.

Addressing these issues early can have a profound impact on improving quality of life and reducing later violence concerns.

- Bystanders (friends, neighbors, loved ones): Anyone with an opportunity to observe or interact with a person of concern may see or hear something that generates apprehension. When this happens, bystanders are urged to communicate that information on to an appropriate person, as referenced below in “Bystanders.”

Early recognition of barriers

As soon as a team receives a new report and an assessment and strategy are being considered, it must also begin thinking about what obstructions may surface. The earlier a threat management team recognizes particular hindrances, the more effectively it can address them. Barriers at multiple stages can inhibit effective management. Some barriers may be intentional (e.g., a resistant parent) and some may not be (e.g., confusion about privacy laws and information sharing), but all can complicate the process.

Barriers to successful engagement vary in degrees of difficulty, and can be encountered throughout the process. For example, erroneous information may surface during any stage of assessment. This common occurrence can cause threat managers to treat unsubstantiated rumor as fact and exhaust resources prematurely, or lead to a stalemate wait-and-see circumstance wherein they lack sufficient, corroborated information upon which to base case decisions. Avoiding these barriers requires threat managers to carefully validate information when it is received. As threat management teams mature, they will become increasingly adept at identifying and navigating challenges. Members should always take the time to consider all obstacles during every assessment.

Self-awareness

Stakeholders and threat management teams should be on guard against becoming barriers themselves. They may inadvertently minimize concern for a variety of reasons. Members may find themselves desensitized to a person of concern who has been an annoyance for a long period of time, or they may be uncertain about what particular behaviors truly mean. They may have difficulty in accepting that a true violence concern could exist in a given community. There may be uncertainty about which stakeholder is responsible for a case.

Additionally, stakeholders or teams may erroneously believe that responsibility for a case or particular issue falls to another organization, or they may simply not know their own organizations’ policies and authorities. They may fear being sued or fear inadequate liability protection in the event of litigation; while this is a natural and likely inevitable concern, the obstacle arises when this fear becomes crippling to the point where no action is taken. These potential barriers may be alleviated by establishment of sound policies and procedures grounded in law and established responsibilities. Tools like non-disclosure agreements, memorandums of understanding, and/or standard operating procedures can help.

Information sharing

Another potential barrier to effective engagement is open information sharing amongst entities and threat management teams. It is critically important that stakeholders and team members alike completely and accurately share information to the extent possible. For example, school administrators can share staff observations and social services can share information about family dynamics. There are times, however, when information sharing is subject to limitations by law. For example, only law enforcement agencies are generally entitled to view criminal history information, and certain limitations on disclosure apply to health information and educational records. These limitations do not translate to absolute prohibitions, and one must understand what federal and state laws allow before proceeding.

Violence and mental illness

Researchers have been exploring the relationship between mental illness and violence for the better part of four decades. On balance, studies show a small but significant relationship between serious mental disorder, particularly psychotic disorders, and general violence risk.⁶ Although most people with a major mental illness do not commit violent acts, the likelihood of it is slightly greater for someone with a serious mental illness than for someone who is not so afflicted. Co-occurring variables can either enhance or decrease risk. Risk factors include past violence, childhood exposure to violence, substance abuse or dependence, and numerous environmental stressors.⁷ When considering targeted violence, substantially higher rates of severe mental illness have been observed among adult mass murderers, public figure attackers, and lone actor terrorists than in the general population.⁸

Behavior, not diagnosis

It can be tempting to get caught up in questions about a person of concern's mental health diagnosis, particularly when vague statements are made to suggest he may be unstable, hear voices, or "may" have been diagnosed with a disorder. Understanding that a specific behavior can be connected to a specific diagnosis may help validate observations and reports of others. For example, knowing someone has been diagnosed on the autism spectrum can help explain and validate observations about strained social interactions, lack of visible emotions, and inflexibility with routines. However, it can also foster unsupported assumptions about other behaviors which may not be occurring. Initial diagnoses are sometimes incorrect due to any number of factors, or they are later amended or clarified. After all, a person being evaluated may very well demonstrate different symptoms or behaviors at different times, leading to diagnostic uncertainty and flux. It is best to avoid becoming focused on diagnosis when a person is being assessed for violence potential.

Ultimately, behaviors are the foundation of any mental health diagnosis, but they do much more than simply inform diagnosis and treatment. Behaviors can be clues to a person's intentions. For example, if threat managers learn that a person of concern was discovered in a potential target's neighborhood and he does not normally belong there, that could be evidence of pre-operational surveillance. Whether the person who is conducting the approach behavior is diagnosed with schizophrenia, antisocial personality disorder, or nothing at all is much less relevant at this juncture.

That a person of concern may be actively involved with surveillance of a target, rather than what diagnosis might be affecting this behavior, is what will drive the threat assessment.

However, information about a specific diagnosis may be quite helpful during threat *management*. Different internal states implicate different techniques to reduce violence concern. For example, a recent case involved a highly paranoid individual with whom law enforcement had to successfully interact in order to manage violence concerns. During what was to be a lengthy encounter, detectives brought prepackaged and sealed food and drink to counteract any paranoia he may have felt about being poisoned by others—one of his ongoing perceptions.

Threat assessment and management is an intertwined, dynamic process with mental disorder symptoms and diagnoses being several pieces in a larger puzzle.

Chapter 2 Identification: An Essential Step for Threat Management

Low probability/high impact events

Targeted violence attacks generate fear and anxiety. The seeming randomness of these crimes leaves members of the public wondering if they are safe at any given time. In reality, targeted violence attacks represent a low base rate, albeit high impact, crime. Base rate refers to the frequency of these events in a certain population over a certain period of time. The base rate for school attacks will differ from the base rate for public figure assassinations, though both are examples of targeted violence.

Even one homicide is too many. However, the generally low incidence of this kind of offense is worth noting. As of 2006, the average American K-12 school could expect one of its current or former students to be involved in a homicide on its grounds about once every 13,870 years.⁹ Even with frequency of targeted violence shooting events on the rise at this moment,¹⁰ student-associated intentional gun deaths at school have risen and fallen multiple times since 1992.¹¹ Workplace homicide has declined significantly since 1993, and continues to do so, although it remains a significant problem.¹² The sort of violence this guide concerns itself with, however, is less apparent in typical statistical reports. It is difficult to find consensus on the number of targeted violence attacks regardless of venue, because the exact criteria for counting an incident often varies among academic researchers, media, and the government.

That said, this guide was not written to highlight statistics and probabilities. It was written because these incidents are horrific, wrenching, and, symposium participants believe, may be preventable. As for randomness, they are rarely, if ever, truly random. The term targeted violence refers to an incident of violence where a known or knowable assailant chooses a particular target prior to a violent attack.¹³ The chosen target may be one or more individuals, a class or category of individuals, or an institution. The offender may not actually reach or ultimately harm the chosen target for any number of reasons, but pre-event target selection of some kind has been made. This targeting is, in a sense, one of the keys to prevention. It likely means the would-be offender has a personal grievance toward someone, a group of persons, or perhaps an organization. It may be openly expressed, along with the idea that violence is the only valid solution to the problem perceived by the grievant. Research, planning, and preparation are likely needed in order to ensure success. Other behaviors, as well as expressions and communications, may hint at or outright announce an intention to become violent. All of these mental and behavioral “waypoints” along a pathway to violence may be observed by someone, who can in turn report to authorities.

Bystanders become upstanders

Bystanders are the force multiplier of threat management. They are the extra eyes and ears for threat management teams, school administrators, human resource managers, police officers, and others responsible for the safety of others. The value of bystanders in prevention efforts cannot be overstated.

Bystanders are a key component for prevention of targeted violence events. A bystander is anyone positioned to have awareness of risk factors or to observe warning behaviors related to a person

who may be considering acting violently. A bystander can be a friend on social media, a classmate, a co-worker, a neighbor, a family member, or a casual observer. The term upstander has been previously used to describe individuals who spoke out against genocide,¹⁴ and more recently in the context of countering bullying. It may more accurately describe the desired response in bystanders—that they will report what they know or see to law enforcement, human resources, school staffers, or a caring adult. An upstander can potentially intervene by various means, but most importantly by simply conveying what he knows, observes, or fears may happen.

Transforming bystanders into upstanders is a must. However, bystanders may feel overwhelmed by or fearful of informing on a friend or associate, because of any of the following concerns:

- Potential for ridicule
- Potential for reprisal either from the person of concern or from the organization
- Appearance of being a “snitch”
- Potential of not being taken seriously
- Uncertainty about the seriousness of the information or situation
- Mistrust of confidentiality or mistrust of the system to handle the situation appropriately
- Desire to remain uninvolved in the affairs of others
- Other concerns which may be unique to each person

The upstander asks not what should have been done, but what can I do? A culture of shared responsibility helps the upstander feel comfortable doing this. Upstanders also do not assume others will carry the burden of reporting. Steps must be taken to ensure that, in policy and in practice, upstander reporting is valued and treated with discretion and respect. The occasional problematic reporter, or someone who may tend to over-report behavior that may not actually pose a concern, may happen. However, working from an assumption that most people have both a genuine interest in doing the right thing and are not hyper vigilant to benign behaviors, will serve this purpose well.

Among key research findings is the certainty that upstanders are an absolutely critical component of prevention. In one study,¹⁵ researchers found that in 81% of school shooting cases they reviewed, the offender told at least one person about the attack beforehand. In 59% of cases at least two other individuals had some information about the event before it was carried out. This alone

Creating Opportunities

There are programs scattered throughout the country aimed at achieving knowledge and familiarity with students, especially at-risk ones. One model for ensuring that caring adults have “eyes on” every student follows this general format: imagine a large chart with all school staff names listed across the top for each column, and each student name listed down the side for each row.

Staffers mark the box for each student they know by name and with whom they can comfortably have a conversation. A box left completely empty represents a student with no relationship with a caring adult at the school—no eyes are on that student. Special attention is then paid to establishing some kind of relationship between at least one staffer and that student. If successful, no student completely slips through the cracks at that school. This system may not be a full-proof measure against violence, but it may dramatically reduce the chances that an at-risk student will spiral downward outside the awareness of those

empowered to help

suggests that upstanders are invaluable resources who create opportunities for intervention and ultimately prevention.

Research of both successful attacks and potentially prevented cases reveals several observations about bystanders:

- Bystanders may take steps to convey information, or they may do nothing
- The school/workplace/environmental climate directly affects whether bystanders come forward
- Bystanders sometimes do not believe violence will actually occur, or they misjudge the likelihood and immediacy of the threat
- For student bystanders, parents or parental figures influence whether they will report¹⁶
- Bystanders are more likely to report if there is an anonymous way to do so, if the means of reporting is clear and easy, and if they believe the authority receiving the report to be trustworthy

In view of the impact these events have on communities and the nation, virtually everyone in society can be an upstander. They should be viewed as such and, more importantly, encouraged to *view themselves* as such.

Ideally all community members will be upstanders. When someone hears or sees something concerning children, family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers, they might ideally ask questions or at least think about whether there is a concern that should be brought to the attention of authorities. For example, one recent case involved a juvenile who received hundreds of ball bearings by mail order, a fact known by his parents. When his parents asked, their son provided an explanation that did not necessarily make sense and yet went unchallenged. Subsequently, the juvenile used the ball bearings to construct several improvised explosive devices with an intention to engage in violence while his parents remained unaware of his true intent.

Opportunities for identification

Each bystander in a person of concern's sphere represents an opportunity to identify potential warning behaviors. Behavior supports assessments as to the appropriate level of concern and guides management strategies. One concern is that bystanders may be unaware of the importance of the information they possess. This may be because any one person could possess a relatively small amount of information: perhaps a comment overheard in the hallway or a sudden flurry of odd social media posts. A bystander could dismiss or downplay the importance of the information because he is unaware the person is exhibiting many other warning behaviors outside of his field of view. It could take reporting from many upstanders to form an accurate picture of a case. Without the support of upstanders in many segments of society, threat assessment and management would be much more challenging.

Threatening behavior can include communication or physical actions intended to intimidate others. When ignored, these behaviors can escalate to more serious problems. Someone who engages in harassment, intimidation, bullying or making threats must be assumed to be doing so with intention,

and the behavior may be repeated as long as it is [a] effective in supplying the person with something he wants, or [b] not stopped by an authority with the power to do so. Although not a complete list, some examples of reportable behavior could include:

- Any physical violence toward a person or property
- Direct or indirect threats of violence
- Any act, gesture or statement that would be interpreted by a reasonable person as threatening or intimidating, such as overt physical or verbal intimidation, throwing objects or other gestures intended to cause fear, or making contextually inappropriate statements about harming others
- Unusual or bizarre behavior that would cause a reasonable person to fear injury or harm due to its nature and severity, such as: stalking; erratic or bizarre behavior suggestive of mental disturbance or substance abuse; fixation with mass murder, weapons, or violence generally; or fixation with hate group, terrorist, or extremist material
- Any statements or behaviors indicating suicidality

A more complete summary of concerning behaviors which may be worthy of upstander reporting is found in Chapter 3, Assessment: Analysis for Guiding Management.

Reporting and reporting mechanisms

Reporting is an essential part of prevention. Reporting mechanisms should be easy to understand and effective at getting information to someone empowered to act on it. Transparency is advised, including clear notice regarding to whom a report should be made, how it may be reported, and preferably offer multiple options for each. An anonymous reporting system should be an option. While perhaps not ideal in all instances, it may be the only way some people feel comfortable reporting.

To maximize observation and reporting of warning signs, organizations and communities should foster an environment of shared responsibility by:

- Designing a strong violence prevention program
- Developing reporting mechanisms that are easy to understand and use
- Creating organizational policies to structure and implement these concepts to encourage reporting
- Providing training for upstanders, leaders and threat managers to ensure effectiveness

Creating a culture of shared responsibility

Ultimately, a culture of shared responsibility will further the goal of prevention. One thing that sets upstanders apart is that they often feel a positive emotional connection to their environment—to school and staff, to the workplace, or to a larger community. This connection seems to be fostered by a climate of safety and respect, wherein people feel joined with the community or organization and believe that others in that environment know and care for them. For example, in school settings this happens when social and emotional interactions occur daily between students, staff, and teachers. Upstanders are more likely to report their concerns when they believe all information is valued and that

coming forward will not cause harm. Targeted violence offenders sometimes convey vague information about the possibility of an attack, which very reasonably may cause a bystander to be concerned about overreacting. Uncomfortable gut feelings about inappropriate conduct are worth reporting, and someone trained to understand targeted violence can evaluate the information. An upstander may have one small piece of information which in turn is used to complete the larger picture; without it authorities may be unable to accurately assess a situation.

Making a threat versus posing a threat

A threat is an expression of intention to inflict injury or damage¹⁷ and is often one of the first ways a person of concern may be identified. Whether it is an actual expression of intent to do harm, a “leakage” of violent thought, or merely an inappropriate statement, it is something that needs further exploration. Threat assessment may begin when a threat is reported, but it does not end there. All threats are not created equal, although they must all be taken seriously and thoroughly evaluated. Content (i.e., the words or deeds used), context (i.e., what happens before, during and after a threat is made) and circumstances (i.e., surrounding facts, such as method of delivery, relationship between threatener and target, or type of target) must all be thoroughly assessed in order to determine what level of concern is appropriate when a threat is made.

A *direct* threat has been defined as an unambiguous statement to a target or to authorities of intent to do harm. In many circumstances there is little to no correlation between a directly threatening communication and a subsequent act of targeted violence.¹⁸ This is most likely to be true when no relationship exists between the threatener and target. Conversely, when a threatener and target *do* have a relationship, violence becomes more likely to occur. This concept is discussed in detail later in this section.

Whether an individual has actually conveyed a threat should *not* be a driving factor in the decision to follow through on a report. In fact, for a person who truly intends to do harm, making a direct threat would be quite counterproductive. Doing so naturally causes a logical and predictable chain of events to begin to unfold, including investigation, increased vigilance, and target hardening, each presenting challenges to the would-be offender.

While directly threatening communications should be thoroughly evaluated, a genuine forewarning of violence is often not intended by the threatener. Conversely, a person could *pose* a very real threat of violence without ever communicating that idea to anyone. Stakeholders should consider the communicated threat, but the focus should be on whether the person *poses* a threat through the consideration of all information. It is important to understand: ¹⁹

- Some persons who make threats ultimately pose a threat
- Some persons who pose a threat never make threats
- Many persons who make threats do not pose a threat

Postponing action until a person of concern has overtly threatened someone may be a grave mistake. However, if a decision is made to interview or confront a person of concern, he may deny any ill intent and even apologize for causing concern. Denial places threat assessors in a difficult position, particularly where there may be fear of litigation or complaint by the person under scrutiny. Even so, a denial of intent to do harm should not be taken at face value, as it is not proof of benign purpose. Someone truly intending to hurt others will rarely admit it when confronted with his threatening statements or actions. Outright denial, rationalization, or minimization can be tactics to avoid immediate repercussions, to allow him to continue on unfettered, and/or to allow him to enjoy manipulating the situation. Not everyone who engages in menacing and threatening behavior intends harm. However, simply taking a person's word for it when he has already demonstrated an inability or unwillingness to behave appropriately is unwise. Rather, the denial should be considered a piece of information in the evaluation of the whole case.

Intimacy effect

When both threatener and target are known, particular attention should be paid to their relationship in attempting to assess the appropriate level of concern for violence. Threats become more valuable as pre-incident indicators of violence when the degree of intimacy between a threatener and target increases.²⁰ This is referred to as the intimacy effect. Actual intimates are very close, of course, and therefore it is appropriate to assign a high level of concern to cases of threats, harassment and stalking directed toward an intimate or former intimate. These cases can also have a "spillover" effect at work, school or public places, wherein opportunistically chosen victims are targeted in addition to the desired one. One study found that over 70% of men who murdered their intimate partners explicitly threatened to do so beforehand.²¹ Other degrees of intimacy exist and should be considered. Work colleagues, students at the same school, and members of the same congregation or community all have degrees of closeness. This relationship allows a threatener to know where a target spends time, what a target's vulnerabilities might be, and could also provide sufficient emotional investment for a threatener to feel angry or humiliated if his threats fail to provoke the desired behavior. Should a target decide to refuse demands or fail to demonstrate the desired reaction, the threatener may then be faced with a choice: admit his impotence or take action to show the target and possibly the world that he should have been taken seriously. Strangers, particularly those separated by significant distances, have the lowest degree of intimacy and therefore threats made in that context do not automatically generate the same level of concern.

Stalking

Not all stalking cases will include an act of targeted violence. However, in the broadest definition of the word stalking—hunting for prey—it can be argued that every act of targeted violence involves some aspect of stalking. All stalking behaviors, historical and current, should be considered as part of any threat assessment, regardless of whether the stalking has anything to do with the person of concern's identified grievance.

A person of concern who has engaged in previous stalking incidents may demonstrate ability to engage in research, planning, and preparation towards a target. The use of those terms—the middle steps on the “pathway to violence”—demonstrate even further the association of stalking with targeted violence. (See pages 24-25, 32-33) Stalkers may also be described as “fixed” and “focused” which are dimensions to be considered when assessing the potential targeted violence offender. The person of concern's stalking behaviors should be evaluated for recency, frequency, and severity as they may be illustrative of the problematic way he engages with others and/or the unhealthy way he interacts with the world. This information will allow threat management teams to evaluate the individual's ability to engage in pathway behaviors and how quickly he may navigate the stages. It may be that a person of concern's previous incidents of stalking were unintentionally a training mechanism for future targeted violence.

A stalking case may be the reason a person of concern is brought to the threat management team. All stalkers should be considered “persons of concern” within the context of this guide. The assessment for violence should be explored in any stalking investigation; utilizing a threat assessment team is an ideal way to accomplish this task. While there is research on the link between stalking and targeted acts of violence, it has yet to be fully understood and all too often incidents of stalking are minimized. Currently, there is no consistent mechanism amongst jurisdictions to record whether stalking behaviors preceded a homicide. The true association between stalking and other targeted violence warrants further study. It is not a mere coincidence that stalking behaviors have been identified in the timelines of previous targeted attackcases.

The team should be mindful that many stalking cases are unreported, as such the absence of a stalking charge in an individual's record is not reflective of his potential engagement in this crime. Often in stalking cases, other charges such as trespass or criminal mischief may be used to criminalize the actions of the offender. Obtaining the actual police reports in such cases may reveal the underlying stalking behaviors. Further, the fact that a stalking case may not have risen to a criminal level does not diminish the concern of the stalking behaviors. Such information may be garnered through the interviews of the family, friends and associates of the person of concern. It is of utmost importance to be cognizant of and not dismiss any signs of current and historical stalking conducted by the individual.

Anonymous communicated threats

Many threatening communications are sent anonymously. They may come in the form of notes, emails, bathroom wall scrawls, or other methods. In addition to attempting to assess an appropriate level of concern (See Appendix A) provoked by the communication itself, logical investigation should be conducted when these are received in an effort to identify authorship. When a threat is made, the threat itself should be assessed by considering several variables, including the manner and context in which the threat was conveyed and the apparent relationship between the threatener and the target.

Electronic threats can be a particular concern—the internet age has made it entirely too easy to threaten and harass just about anyone anonymously. Anonymity, whether real or perceived, increases disinhibition and lowers behavioral constraints normally felt during more personal interactions. The perceived absence of monitoring or controls, as well as the ease of finding like-minded virtual friends, can also reinforce bad online behavior (see page 50: Pronoid pseudo-communities).²² Does this necessarily correlate with increased violence risk? Much work remains to be done in the area of electronic threats research. Although data are preliminary, threatening Tweets are not thought to be predictive of a physical approach absent other simultaneous activity or contact toward a target.²³ However, as with any case, each circumstance warrants individual scrutiny, paying particular attention to:

- Any noted patterns of escalation
- Intensity of effort and focus observed in a pattern of communications
- Potential leakage of harmful intent (See pages 34-35: Leakage)
- Evidence of a personalized motive by the threatener
- Expressed intention to approach
- Justifications for violence²⁴

Analysis of threatening communications

Several questions may help assess level of concern for violence when a threatening communication is received. These are a few generalities for consideration and not an all-inclusive list of communication assessment questions. Each case is unique and contains numerous variables, all of which cannot be accounted for here.

- What is the relationship or prior contact between threatener and target(s)?
 - The degree to which the intimacy effect is applicable should always be considered
- Does the method of delivery indicate physical proximity by the threatener?
 - Signs of a possible approach may be more concerning than a long-distance mailing
- How many communications were received, by whom, and over what time frame?
 - Increasing intensity of effort (measured by frequency, duration, and different means of communication) may be a sign of escalation
- According to the threatener, when will the threatened action or consequence happen?

- Generally, alerting the target and authorities to a violent plan is counterproductive to success; however, anniversaries and dates which are significant to the author may be reason for concern
- An expression of time running out or a looming deadline may justify increasing concern
- What is the significance of any identified dates or places?
 - Certain dates or places may be symbolic of past attacks or upcoming events which have meaning to the threatener
- Is the threatened plan of harm feasible, given what is known about the threatener?
 - Highly unrealistic plans may be indicative of an insincere threatener
- What details are known about any grievance or issue identified in the threat?
 - Threats involving a personal motivation or justification for violence are generally cause for greater concern than those which merely threaten

First Amendment protected speech

First Amendment protected speech principles are implicated where public communications are concerned; privacy rights, on the other hand, govern the gathering or viewing of private communications or other personal items of relevance in a case. As a threat assessment strategy, monitoring a person of concern's communications is sometimes recommended; these may include publicly accessible social media or weblog ("blog") posts, school essays, articles, books, or communications authored by the person. These options, like any other threat assessment option, must be considered in view of legal authorities and protections, including the fundamental right of free expression guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

The First Amendment protects this right. However, not all forms of expression are protected "speech." It is important to understand the line between Constitutionally-protected speech, and advocacy of violence or conduct that may lead to violence or other unlawful activity. The First Amendment does not protect, among other things, "true threats," fighting words, incitement of imminent lawless action, or material support to terror groups. Context, target, and intention are all important to figuring out whether something is an unprotected "true threat" as defined by the US Supreme Court. In a "true threat," the threatener *intends to communicate a serious expression of intent* to commit unlawful violence against an individual or group; he need not actually *intend to carry out* the threat.²⁵ Since the lower courts do not entirely agree on how to apply this definition, in those cases where a threat has been made and a threat assessment team may be recommending prosecution, consultation with the prosecutors is necessary to determine whether the statement in question is protected speech.

In addition to purely First Amendment considerations, governmental agencies must have an authorized purpose for monitoring someone's speech. One such authorized purpose is trying to determine whether a person is exhibiting behaviors that pose a concern for significant and imminent violence. In cases involving protected speech, for example, where someone has not articulated a threat, the government cannot take an action that destroys, or even significantly diminishes, his ability to communicate a public message or idea through his words or deeds.

In a school setting, conduct on school campuses that either 1) materially disrupts class work, or 2) involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of others, does not carry First Amendment protection.²⁶ In a workplace setting, employees are not entitled to unrestricted speech on any topic; they must be speaking about a matter of "public concern" in order to have First Amendment protection.²⁷ Simply stated, context matters. The First Amendment has limitations, and courts "will consider time, place, manner of expression, and organizational and individual impact" when deciding whether an expression is protected by the First Amendment.²⁸

Elonis v. United States – Online Threats

In *Elonis v. United States*, commonly referred to as "the Facebook threats case," the United States Supreme Court examined the "guilty mind" necessary for a conviction under federal law for communicating threats in interstate commerce. Mr. Elonis posted a number of disturbing statements on his Facebook account, stating a desire to kill his estranged wife, a kindergarten class, and law enforcement officials who investigated his threatening behaviors. His statements were often specific and brutally violent. Mr. Elonis maintained that he did not mean to threaten anyone; rather, he meant to engage in artistic expression as a rapper. The case was originally expected to be decided on First Amendment grounds. However, rather than focusing on free speech the Supreme Court reversed his conviction on a technicality. News of the reversal nevertheless created a degree of false fear that internet threat cases would be difficult to successfully prosecute.

When considering prosecution of online threats in light of *Elonis*, law enforcement is encouraged to collect and memorialize, during data collection and interviews, any evidence that tends to prove a person of concern who transmitted a threatening message did so *for the purpose* of issuing a threat or with knowledge that the communication *will be viewed* as a threat. If a threatener alleges he intended only sarcasm or humor, investigators should be on the lookout for evidence that contradicts this allegation. Any circumstantial evidence that counters a threatener's position that his threats were just "artistic expression" may also be helpful. As a final note, in those cases where law enforcement officials admonish a person of concern who makes an online threat, they should carefully document the admonishment and the threatener's responses, demeanor, and behavior.

Chapter 3 Assessment: Analysis for Guiding Management

Targeted violence threat assessment is complex. High level of violence concern almost invariably results from many factors, only some of which may be plainly visible to a threat assessment team. There will be unknown details in every case. This is a primary reason why threat assessment is a nuanced and complex discipline. A great deal of time and study is required to develop proficiency in threat assessment. As human behavior is variable in nature, thoughtful consideration of many facts and circumstances is required to conduct a thorough assessment.

There are no “usual suspects”

There is no demographic profile of a targeted violence offender. Objective assessment of threat enhancing and mitigating circumstances is the key to evaluating concern for violence. Any individual, no matter what age, sex, race, religion, education or income level, marital status, or occupation, has the potential to engage in targeted violence. The first step in preventing future violence is identifying and evaluating a person’s behaviors. No single behavior is predictive of targeted violence; rather, a “perfect storm” sometimes develops based on a multitude of factors and conditions. When conducting an assessment, the facts and circumstances identified in this chapter must each be examined while focusing on the person of concern, the potential target(s), the situation, and the setting. Threat assessment is a multifaceted process, stemming from a holistic analysis of the pattern of behaviors displayed by a person of concern.

Data interpretation and weighting

A checklist approach to assessment can work to ensure relevant topics are considered, but not for deciding how much weight to place upon each fact and circumstance. Assessment of each fact and circumstance must be uniquely weighted based upon:

- What makes up the whole person, including his behaviors and characteristics
- Any direction of interest in persons, places, or issues demonstrated by the person of concern
- The situation including a grievance, environmental and contextual factors, or recent or anticipated losses
- The setting including organizational culture and the physical setting²⁹

Totality of circumstances versus singular points of assessment will drive the ultimate level of concern held by a threat management team. Human judgment applied to each factor on a case-by-case basis is the only endorsed method of violence threat assessment.

Bias

"Analysis at a glance" is a threat assessment hazard. Unintended bias by assessors must be understood and avoided. There are several types, each posing its own unique challenge. The BAU suggests that threat management teams adopt an evidence-based, structured approach to its work, rather than a biased approach.

The tendency to look for evidence or interpret information in a way that confirms a preconceived opinion is *confirmation bias*. Human nature is often such that it is easier to notice facts that support already held beliefs and overlook facts that do not. Further, this bias can also cause one to give greater weight to such information because of the tendency to accept it at face value without scrutiny. Even worse, people are usually better able to remember such information. For example, a preconceived belief is "I know John is going to end up shooting up this place because he has been angry for a long time." To support this opinion, one might then only collect examples of when John's anger has attracted attention—while ignoring examples of his positive behaviors.

Availability bias is a tendency to assign the most importance to behavior which comes immediately to mind—if it can be recalled quickly then it must be important, or at least more important than other information which is not as readily recalled. This presents a risk that the most recent information will outweigh older information simply based upon its recency rather than on its importance. The takeaway for threat managers? Take care to evaluate behavior over time when possible; then it will likely become clearer if the person of concern is escalating, de-escalating, or holding steady.

"Hindsight is 20/20." This statement is never truer than when discussing the predictability of violent attacks. *Hindsight bias* is the inclination, after an event, to see it as having been more predictable than it was. A tendency to blame based upon an erroneous belief that something was predictable can potentially affect threat managers, such as when a particular threat management technique is not successful. For example, if mental health counseling is recommended but fails to de-escalate a person of concern's behavior, those critical of the threat management process may blame the team for making an incorrect recommendation because the person of concern reacted negatively to a suggestion he attend counseling. Hindsight bias facilitates a potentially erroneous argument that the team should have predicted that counseling would fail, when in reality there would have been no way to know that before implementation.

Hindsight bias can affect threat assessment and management by inducing *foresight bias*, which emphasizes an unrealistic ability to predict future events. This kind of bias could cause stakeholders or threat managers to erroneously apply outcomes in previous cases to the current one, even when the fact patterns are dissimilar. For example, one assailant posted what he called a "manifesto" online before offending against a camp of juveniles. Foresight bias might cause observers to conclude that every troubled person who posts a manifesto is about to engage in violence. Psychologists, in particular, have faced the challenge of being asked to predict who will become a violent offender from among the overwhelming majority of non-violent mentally ill; even with the best available instruments general violence prediction is only moderately accurate.

Biases can occur or become more pronounced when fatigue or complacency become an issue. These problems can affect threat managers and stakeholders during a long term, repetitive, or unusually intense case. In those situations, threat management teams should remember that facts and

circumstances can quickly change a case and the level of concern for violence it generates. Thus, teams should consider how best to mitigate fatigue or inadvertent complacency. Team structure itself may assist in reducing fatigue because the weight of a case, or all cases, does not rest on one person alone. Teams must also be on guard against complacency by remaining focused on the task at hand and maintaining a positive mental outlook.

Triage versus 360° assessment

A primary purpose of an assessment is to inform decision-making regarding how, and how quickly, to best manage a person of concern away from violence. An assessment is only as good as the information upon which it is formulated. The quantity and quality of information collected will likely dictate the assessment's degree of accuracy and utility. In addition to addressing concerns about public safety, stakeholders should also strive to promote a person of concern's well-being. Optimally, threat managers would like to obtain as much relevant information as possible about the person of concern and the events occurring in his life, in order to devise the most appropriate management strategy. This is referred to as a whole person or 360° assessment. It typically requires an abundance of investigative effort and time. However, in instances where the information on the person of concern is unknown or unavailable and time is of the essence, the threat assessment can and should function more like a triage process. Relying on limited information which likely reveals behaviors over a short time, a triage assessment is used to determine case prioritization and resource allocation, and can include a preliminary level of concern and any immediately necessary management strategies. The use of triage assessments is vital, especially when multiple cases arise simultaneously, similar to emergency medical professionals assessing patients based on their urgency of need for care. Whole person assessment and triage share the same goal: to maximize threat mitigation and ultimately prevent violence.

Having a sense of urgency and knowing when to apply it are important skills for threat managers. Distinction must be made between cases requiring an emergent response, and those which do not. This will involve being able to determine whether a particular case justifies a low level of concern for targeted violence risk, a high level of concern, or somewhere in between. A system in use at the BAU, and elsewhere, for delineating between levels of concern (See Appendix A) was inspired by the National Weather Service (NWS) system of [1] no message, [2] watch, or [3] warn.³⁰ Example: the NWS remains silent on the topic of tornadoes on any given day for which the chance of one is not measurably above the base rate. The NWS issues a tornado *watch* when the conditions are right for the formation of such an event, making it possible. It does not mean one will occur. It issues a *warning* when a tornado has been sighted or is imminent. For assessing violence concern, the BAU adopts a similar posture, one which takes into account the appropriate level of concern for [a] violence potential, and [b] how imminent that violence may be, based upon an application of published research and the unit's experience with case facts and circumstances. A concern level does not predict violence likelihood but rather expresses the extent to which conditions may facilitate violence potential.

Standardization of processes from intake through assessment is strongly recommended; case *management* will be unique in each instance. This chapter identifies those elements which should be

considered in assessing a case for violence concern and imminence. These include enhancers (risk factors, warning behaviors, stressors and precipitating events, and indicators of potential imminence) and mitigators. Every case is unique and will feature varying numbers of these elements; a checklist-based or quantitative formulaic method for assessing a case is not endorsed. A case may have an overwhelming number of threat mitigators, for example, and only three enhancing factors. However, if those enhancers are firearms access, substance abuse, and a persecutory delusional belief system, those three may very well overwhelm any number of mitigators. Conversely, a single mitigator (e.g., convalescing due to a serious physical illness) could dramatically reduce violence concern even in the face of a slew of enhancers. This is where a trained and experienced team, following a standardized assessment protocol, becomes an effective tool for managing persons of concern away from targeted violence.

Pathway to violence

It is generally believed that persons intending to engage in targeted violent acts move along an identifiable pathway on their journey to attack.³¹ The progression may be rapid or slow, and will not follow the same course from person to person. Some scholars have proposed pathway-like maps, while others have identified key indicators of high or imminent risk. Recently, the pathway concept was proposed as merely one of eight warning behaviors. Pathways can exist in multiple and complex forms, or may not exist at all in some cases.³² Regardless of which model is adopted for use, threat managers will find that both state of mind and outward behaviors of the person of concern are inextricably intertwined—behavior is a manifestation of thought. For the purposes of this practical guide, the well-known pathway to violence model which crystallized over the past twenty years and is relatively easy to understand, is presented. Further discussion later in this chapter will place this pathway within a larger constellation of warning behaviors.

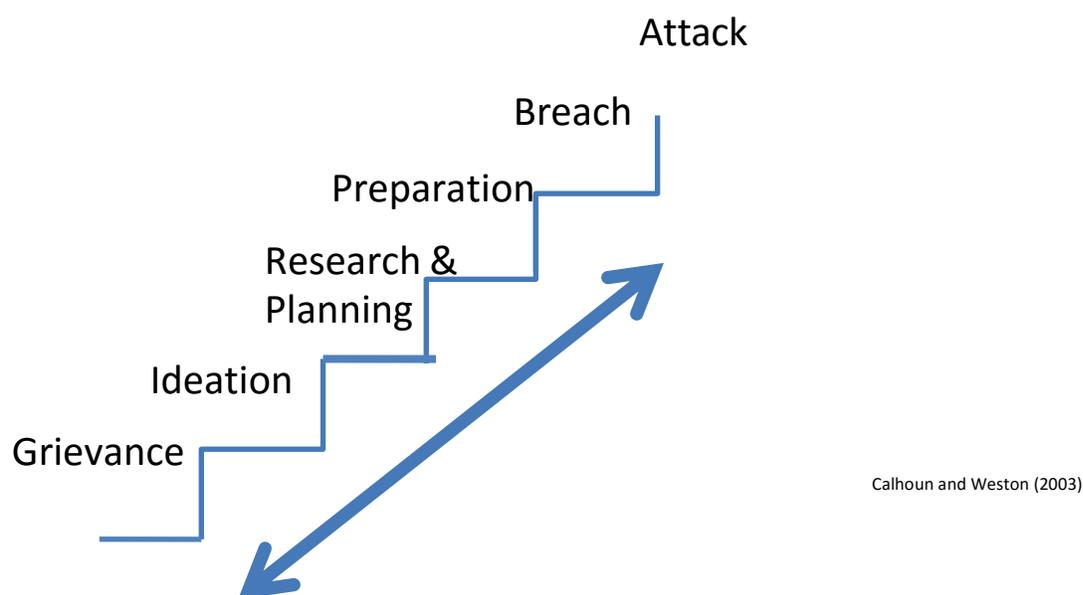
The traditionally known pathway to violence model is an excellent place to begin the discussion because it addresses the question of “why?” It describes a first step on the journey toward intended violence as the formation of a deeply held personal grievance or humiliation based upon real or imagined injustices inflicted upon the grievant. This grievance could be against an individual, an institution, or other entity the person of concern feels slighted or wronged him. It may be nurtured and cultivated over time, even years. Depending upon the particular individual, it may be plainly evident to all around him or kept hidden and private. Although there are cases of targeted violence in which a grievance or motivation was never identified, this appears to be rare with regard to the kind of mass targeted violence attacks this guide addresses. Regardless of whether a specific grievance exists or can be pinpointed, only a few general motives for mass targeted violence offending appear to be prevalent in the experience of the BAU. They include:

- Revenge for a perceived injury or grievance
- Quest for justice (as defined by the offender)
- Desire for notoriety or recognition
- Desire to solve a problem perceived to be unbearable

➤ Desire to kill or be killed

When a person of concern for targeted violence is unable to resolve the negative emotional burden of unachieved justice, he could then progress to a violent ideation: the idea that violence is an acceptable, or even the only, means of achieving redress.³³ Unable to shake off a grievance and its accompanying anger, despair, humiliation, or other negative emotional responses, the person of concern may eventually conclude that violence is justified, necessary, and his only choice. The adoption of this idea can be profoundly relieving, almost like a salve on a wound. It is for this reason that a sudden turnaround by a formerly angry, depressed, or menacing person of concern should not be presumed as good news. More assessment is often prudent.

Additional steps along the pathway are discussed in greater detail on pages 32-33. They involve both emotional and logistical considerations important for planning and carrying out an act of planned violence. They include research and planning, preparation, probing and/or breach of security measures, and the attack itself. A key factor to remember when recognizing that someone is on an apparent pathway to violence, is that time is on his side. Completing the steps from grievance to attack may take weeks, months, or even years. Someone may appear stalled along the way; he may even retreat a step or two. Conversely, the entire route may be covered relatively quickly or steps may not be observable to a threat assessment team. The following graphic illustrates, in very simplistic terms, one of several pathways to planned violence models; it may be useful in visualizing the concepts discussed in this section.



The role played by mental illness

A general stereotype exists that people who suffer from a mental illness may be dangerous.³⁴ There is a small but significant relationship between serious mental illness, such as psychosis, and risk of violence toward others. However, misinformation and/or lack of knowledge or exposure to the

mentally ill may grossly exaggerate this fact. Certainly, the unpredictable behaviors associated with some forms of mental illness can provoke concern. However, many times it is just the fear of the unknown associated with mental illness that makes people uncomfortable.

In the immediate aftermath of a targeted violence event, an inference may be made that *the reason* an incident occurred is the offender was mentally ill. While serious mental illness is substantially present in targeted violence offenders,³⁵ it does not necessarily follow that such illness is *the driving force* behind the decision to offend. Assessing violence potential is more complex and dynamic than simply determining whether or not someone has a mental disorder. Many factors, including some which may be interrelated, play a role in an offender's decision to plan and take violent action; these are discussed in this chapter. People with serious mental illness may have particular vulnerability to other variables which increase risk, such as past violence/childhood exposure to violence, personality disorders, substance abuse or dependence, and numerous environmental stressors.³⁶ When considering serious mental illness, threat managers should assign a logical level of significance to it, based upon the nature of observed symptoms and behaviors.

From a threat assessment perspective, different types of mental illness-driven behaviors may inhibit or enhance violence concern and/or implicate different management strategies. There is a difference between someone who is so mentally disturbed that he cannot organize himself enough to plan and carry out a violent attack, and a functional person with a mental disorder that permits predatory thinking and violent planning, as well as an ability and commitment to follow through.

Threat managers should direct their attention to psychiatric symptoms and associated behaviors, rather than formal diagnoses, for purposes of assessing violence concern. Symptoms of mental disorder can be debilitating for the individual in question and alter his perception of others' interactions and activities. For example, if he is struggling with paranoid beliefs that others are out to get him and he feels threatened or endangered by contact with others, he could potentially feel justified in using violent means to defend himself.

A personality disorder, on the other hand, is not the same sort of disorder as a serious mental illness. It is an enduring, pervasive, and inflexible pattern of internal experience and behavior which is not in harmony with cultural expectations. Personality disorders typically onset in adolescence or early adulthood, and are stable over time. They feature certain attitudes, behaviors and thought patterns

Homicide and suicide are more closely linked than many think. In many cases multiple homicides are linked with prior suicide attempts, gestures, or suicidal ideation on the part of the perpetrator. This is especially true with targeted violence. A "Safe Schools Initiative" research project revealed that 78% (32 of 41 studied) of targeted mass attackers exhibited a history of suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts at some point prior to their attack.³⁷ Moreover, many offenders attempt or succeed at suicide or "suicide by cop" at the conclusion of a targeted violence event.

that are maladaptive. As a result, a personality-disordered individual may be able to conclude that violence is an acceptable or even necessary response to a problem.³⁸ Because he is not, however, disengaged from reality, he is capable of engaging in logistical and rational processes necessary to violently offend. Any observed behavior that demonstrates the person of concern's thoughts, thinking, planning, and organization is important to consider for understanding his trajectory towards violence, if any. Once these are understood, work can begin on managing behaviors and ultimately lowering violence concern.

Forensic Mental Health Assessment/Violence Risk Assessment

A foundation of mental health treatment is the relationship that develops between the patient and his therapist. This therapeutic alliance is essential for the treatment process to work. The theory behind the trust-based therapeutic alliance is that a client seeks treatment from a mental health professional because he genuinely wants to be helped. What this fails to take into account is that someone truly considering engaging in an act of targeted violence must conceal that intention in order to ensure success. This can be difficult for providers inexperienced in such cases to accept. The violence risk assessment process assists in removing subjectivity from the equation.

When mental health professionals attempt to assess an individual's potential danger to himself or others, they may use unstructured, clinical judgment as they interview the person about his history and current mental state. This falls short of a "violence risk assessment," (VRA) ideally performed by forensically trained mental health professionals and which entails a much more systematic, structured, and thorough evaluation of the individual. For example, most clinicians base their suicide risk/homicide risk assessments on a patient's self-report rather than conducting a multi-faceted VRA. An objective VRA involves asking additional questions of the patient which are predetermined and required by the tool being used, as well as gathering collateral information by interviewing family members, reviewing police reports, and conducting psychological testing. This evaluation process may interfere with trust and rapport-building and thus is not emphasized in general mental health provider training. However, unstructured clinical assessments are susceptible to the deceptions and poor insight of the patient. Mental health providers have not been very successful at violence prediction, which explains why forensic psychologists moved away from unstructured clinical assessments to more actuarial or structured assessment approaches to assess risk for violence. Forensic mental health professionals receive much more training on violence risk assessment than other providers.

Although pursuing a formal mental health diagnosis can be a distraction during the assessment process, diagnostic certainty is more useful during the management phase. Diagnosis by a qualified, licensed mental health professional can be a bridge to strategies for interacting with the individual,

treatment if feasible, and an effective threat management plan overall. Mental health intervention should not be considered a standalone solution. Rather, it can and should be part of a comprehensive strategy when mental illness is an aspect of the case. Some persons of concern will be resistant or unreceptive to mental health treatment for various reasons. Even though they may not always be able to communicate back to a threat management team, mental health partners are good resources when psychiatric symptoms and behaviors are present. Evaluation and diagnosis can create additional opportunities for intervention and mitigation of any threat generated by the person of concern.

In this guide only a few of the many issues threat managers and stakeholders may encounter with regard to mental illness have been identified. It is important to think about what approach and interaction methods will be used during encounters with persons of concern who suffer from mental disorders or disturbances. The BAU recommends consultation with qualified, licensed mental health professionals for advice during such instances. Additionally, written resources about interacting with the mentally ill are available which may also provide assistance (see Appendix F, References).

The “person of concern”

As previously noted, a holistic view of a person of concern is needed in order to conduct a viable threat assessment and create a management plan. However, some individual qualities below may be of particular interest in conducting a threat assessment. They include but are not limited to: ³⁹

- Strength of coping mechanisms (i.e., healthy conflict resolution, processing emotional stress, or tolerance for change)
- Negative traits (i.e., desperation, maladjustment, low trust, impulsivity, inattention, irrational thinking, low empathy)
- Attitude about self (i.e., narcissistic/entitled, injustice collector, positive self-esteem, future-oriented)
- Need for attention, recognition, or notoriety
- Response to rules and authority
- Preoccupation with violence
- Deceptiveness and manipulation
- Motivation

Brittle people

The pathway to violence discussed above identifies a potentially observable path along which a person of concern may travel on the way to engaging in a violent attack. Although not every targeted violence event has its origins in a personal grievance, it is a common starting point. Clearly, however, most aggrieved persons do not go on to research, plan, prepare for and execute a targeted violence event. So who are those individuals most at risk for targeted violence? They are exceptionally brittle,⁴⁰ unable to withstand slights, rejections, or offenses both minor and otherwise. Time and again, targeted violence offenders have claimed to be persecuted and alienated from their peers, family, and the world at large, viewing themselves as outsiders and not part of a larger social network. They seem unable to

process the slights, rejections, teasing, and bullying that everyone experiences at some point in their lives. Most people learn to deal with these experiences as a normal, if unfortunate, part of life. Well-adjusted people develop emotional armor and learn to stand up to, ignore, or just ride out such behavior. To a brittle person lacking adequate resources to help him appropriately process and cope, even a minor loss can be absolutely devastating. Brittle targeted violence offenders, moreover, cannot seem to muster a healthy response. They continue to brood and obsess over every injustice, whether real or imagined, that has ever been inflicted upon them. Suicidal feelings are not uncommon. However, it is important to recognize that brittle people who are suicidal can also become homicidal toward others.

Conducting the assessment

In the next few subsections, threat enhancing and threat mitigating factors will be identified and explained, although the individuality of each human being, and therefore each case, prevents this from being considered an exhaustive list. In fact, there may be no such thing. Rather, this information (like the rest of this guide) should be considered as a general reference to get a threat assessment team started in conducting an assessment. With experience will come the expertise to identify additional enhancers and mitigators and evaluate how they fit into an overall case assessment. It is impossible to absolutely quantify the weight of each individual factor. Each case is a unique combination of personal and environmental factors which preclude assigning all relevant factors equal weight. The urge to quantify and calculate an assessment like a math problem must be resisted. Threat assessment envisions a holistic assessment of the person of concern, the potential target, the situation, and the potential setting for an incident.

Threat enhancers

Risk factors

Risk factors are existing realities about the person of concern that may increase the risk of violence he poses in a given situation. They are already in place at the time of assessment. Risk factors, as opposed to the *behaviors* a person may demonstrate (discussed later), can either be static or dynamic. Static risk factors are historical or dispositional, will not change over time or will change very slowly, and are not amenable to intervention (e.g., gender, history of prior violent acts). Dynamic risk factors are situational or clinical, and can and do change, often rapidly (e.g., weapons possession, illegal drug abuse). Some risk factors are highly interrelated with behaviors (e.g., current access to a gun (risk factor) and actively attempting to acquire more guns (behavior)).

Violence History

- History of violence: The best predictor of future violence in many cases is past violence. Past violence might not be indicated in a criminal history report, so it is important to cover this in interviews, social media reviews, personnel file reviews, or other available sources.
- Childhood exposure to violence: Violence in a person of concern's family of origin or adolescent peer group has also been identified as a risk factor for adult violence.

Health/Mental Health

- Substance abuse or dependence: Psychostimulants are a concern, and are encountered as both illicit and prescription drugs; they can increase the fight or flight response, and more importantly for targeted violence assessment, they can cause grandiosity and/or paranoia in some.⁴¹ Generally, prescription medication side effects are variable and can sometimes include violent ideation and altered thought processing. Alcohol lowers serotonin levels in the brain, potentially leading to irritability and aggression.⁴² The use of non-prescription substances could be evidence of self-medication for a diagnosed or undiagnosed issue. However, there is evidence that drug and alcohol abuse is significantly lower among those engaged in targeted violence than those engaged in impulsive/reactive violence.

- Personality disturbance or disorder: Paranoia, narcissism, borderline personality, psychopathic or significant antisocial tendencies, or significant and sustained anger manifestations, can all increase risk of targeted violence and should be taken seriously. They can cause a person of concern to believe violence is justified and acceptable. Facets may include but are not limited to low empathy for others, abdication of personal responsibility, habitual projection of blame onto others, persistent belief that others are malevolent, or chronic belief in one's own superiority over others. If personality disturbance or disorder appears to be a factor in a threat assessment case, a qualified mental health professional should be consulted to help a team understand how it may impact violence concern and potential management strategies.

- Severe mental illness: As previously noted, severe mental illness slightly increases the risk of general violence toward others. Psychosis, in particular, can raise concerns depending upon the nature of the symptoms; however, psychosis alone is neither necessary nor sufficient to assign a high level of concern. Its importance as a risk factor should be connected to how logically linked the symptoms are to future violence.⁴³ Major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders can all feature psychotic symptoms which may elevate risk. Symptoms of special concern include command hallucinations, delusional beliefs of persecution or control, hostility, and grandiosity.⁴⁴ When these symptoms *co-occur with* additional risk factors, particularly substance abuse or dependence, or a confirmed history of violent acts and/or childhood exposure to violence, the concern may increase.

- History of suicidality: If a person of concern has threatened or attempted suicide in the past, this should trouble threat managers. Suicidal and homicidal violence are more closely linked than many realize. Evidence of suicidal thoughts is reflective of lost hope, and it may be accompanied by acceptance of the consequences for behaving violently toward others. Suicide is often contemplated by targeted violence offenders before they decide to attack; instead, they choose to punish those they feel drove them to their plight.⁴⁵ In a study of 160 active shooter incidents in the United States between 2000 and 2013, in 64 incidents (40%), the offender committed suicide.⁴⁶

- Organized: If a person of concern has a demonstrated ability to organize behavior, regardless of any superficial appearance of illogical or incoherent speech or personal presentation, then he is potentially able to plan and carry out an act of violence.

Weapons

- Firearms and edged weapons: It is easier and more lethal to engage in targeted violence, particularly toward multiple targets, with a firearm. Possession of, access to, experience or familiarity with weapons are all risk factors because they improve one's ability to carry out the act. Unfortunately, this can be difficult to determine in many cases. Edged weapons and stabbing instruments have been successfully used in attacks as well; they are often more accessible than firearms.
- Explosives: Fascination or experimentation with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) is a risk factor. They, too, increase ability to do harm and may also indicate study of past targeted violence incidents where IEDs were used or their use was attempted.

Problematic Behavioral History

- History of stalking, harassing, threatening, or menacing behavior: This spectrum of behavior may indicate low empathy, general disregard for rules and limits, or defiance of authority. These behaviors could also represent attempts to or actual breaches of security. If demonstrated as a pattern, it may also indicate the person has become habituated to engaging the world in an aggressive manner, potentially lowering inhibitions about escalating to violence. This is particularly relevant in the majority of mass murders which began with a spousal or family homicide. Several known targeted violence offenders engaged in stalking behavior before they engaged in mass violence.
- History of non-compliance with limits and boundaries: Violations of protective orders or terms of probation, flouting of private property lines (in furtherance of harassing activities, for example), and disregard for rules at school or work, all fall within this category of behavior. Such a history may bode poorly for a threat management strategy that is based on limit-setting, because the person of concern may not be willing to comply with limits.

Social/Environmental

- Negative family dynamics and support system: An unhealthy family or social peer environment can enhance risk. If there is tacit or active endorsement of violence within the home or family sphere, this can affect how the person of concern views violence. Similarly, if law-breaking or other negative tendencies are the norm in a person's family sphere or social environment, it can influence behavior in negative ways. A toxic family or social peer dynamic could even fuel a person of concern to act. Irresponsible and chaotic families can also contribute to casual access to firearms in the home.
- Isolation: Living in physical or emotional isolation from others, particularly from family and friends, deprives the person of concern of emotional support often needed to work through life's

difficulties and challenges. The person has no one to rely upon. This can occur even when the person of concern shares a home with family members.

- Instability: Financial, residential, professional, familial and/or social instability all potentially interfere with the person of concern's ability to become and remain grounded and to feel emotionally safe and secure. Instability in these spheres of life can lead to grievance formation, serve as stressors, and erode coping mechanisms.
- Others are concerned: When behaviors exhibited by the person of concern cause fear in others, stakeholders should take notice. After all, individuals close to the person of concern are often best positioned to observe alarming behaviors. They may not be able to precisely articulate all of the behaviors which concern them; they just know they are troubled.

Warning behaviors

Unlike risk factors, warning behaviors are dynamic and represent changes in patterns of behavior that may be evidence of increasing or accelerating risk.⁴⁷ When warning behaviors are evident, they require a threat management strategy and operational response. They are, for the most part, proximal behaviors, occurring more closely in time to a potential act of targeted violence.

The body of knowledge about warning behaviors is based upon research of and experience with attackers and assassins of celebrities, politicians, and other public figures; psychiatric patients who have engaged in violence; adolescent mass murderers and school shooters; adult mass murderers; spousal homicide perpetrators; workplace violence offenders; and federal judicial threateners and attackers. For each "successful" targeted violence offender with any given behavioral past, there are likely many more who exhibited similar behaviors, but never attacked. Warning behaviors cannot *predict* targeted violence, but are useful in identifying accelerating risk which should elevate concern.

Pathway to violence warning behavior

This set of behaviors refers to the pathway to violence model referenced on pages 24-25. The pathway begins with a grievance and proceeds to violent ideation, as discussed on pages 24-25, while subsequent steps along the pathway are those articulated here. "Pathway warning behavior" may be any behavior that is part of research, planning, preparation, or implementation of an attack.⁴⁸

- Research and planning: Once a person of concern decides that violence should or must be used to seek justice for real or perceived wrongs, under most circumstances he must then begin to think and plan. The person of concern then considers when, how, and where to offend. He can craft and refine his plan by researching methods, the planned target, past offenders, and previous targeted violence incidents. The person of concern may consider both practical and symbolic reasons when selecting potential targets. As with other steps along the pathway, research and planning need not cease when the next step begins; it can and may come with other steps.

➤ **Preparation:** The person of concern may acquire the equipment, skills, and/or any other resources necessary to conduct the attack. This can include obtaining weapons and gear as well as familiarization of and practice with the weapons. The person may conduct an actual or virtual rehearsal of any aspect of the attack (e.g., driving the intended route to the site). It can also include farewell writings or other end of life planning, or creation of artifacts meant to be left behind to claim credit and explain motive.

An example of preparation behavior is the case of Mr. A. He came to the attention of a threat management team after his passport and a notebook filled with violently themed writings were found in a parking lot. Additional investigation determined that he was a danger to others and was actively planning to mount a violent assault. At the time of his psychiatric hospitalization related to the above circumstances, he was an employee of a retail store. Search warrants were executed at Mr. A's house which revealed numerous journals. Of particular note was a notebook containing almost a daily diary of his plans for an assault, seemingly at the store where he worked. After articulating his grievance and general disgust for people who shopped at the store, he wrote that in order to prepare for the assault, he started bringing a large duffle bag to work so his coworkers would not be alarmed on the day when he eventually brought his guns to work in that same bag, in violation of company policy prohibiting firearms at the store.^b This case vignette could also serve as an example of breach behavior, discussed next.

➤ **Breach:** This step involves circumvention of security measures or boundaries at the target location. Breach activities can include conducting dry runs, engaging in approach behaviors to include stalking, and testing security at the target location. In practice, the BAU has expanded this definition to include cyber intrusion behaviors where these breaches may be intended to identify security plans and weaknesses, gain protected information about a target, or otherwise further an attack plan via unauthorized access to systems. Breach behavior may occur immediately prior to an attack, or earlier.

➤ **Attack:** An offense may involve violence against both preplanned and opportunistically chosen targets. Both practical and symbolic acts may occur. The violent offense is the culmination of a highly personalized quest for justice which may, ultimately, only be fully understandable to the offender.

Fixation warning behavior

Any behavior that indicates an increasing preoccupation with a person or a cause may be fixation warning behavior.⁴⁹ It can be demonstrated by an increased focus on the person or cause, and/or an increasingly negative characterization of the same. Further, the frequency and duration of the person of concern's communications about the fixation may significantly increase. Opinions may

^b Case vignettes are provided throughout this guide in order to illustrate points with real-world examples. However, all identifying information has been redacted. The facts utilized may be taken out of their full context for emphasis and in some instances are amalgams of more than once case. Therefore, vignettes should not be considered evidence or presumed to stand alone as the only relevant facts of a case.

become more rigid, and speech and actions may appear angrier. Social or occupational deterioration can occur as the person loses interest or ability to focus on these aspects of his life.

Identification warning behavior

The person may adopt a “pseudo-commando” identity⁵⁰ or warrior mentality, often with the goal of targeting unarmed civilians in a non-military encounter.⁵¹ A preoccupation with firearms and a desire to use them for revenge may be evident.⁵² The person may view himself as an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system.⁵³ The practical aspect of identification warning behavior may feature an unusual fascination with weapons or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia. This can be demonstrated through actual weapons, ammunition or paraphernalia purchases, or through virtual activities such as intense preoccupation with and practice on first-person shooter games, or in-depth on-line research of weapons.⁵⁴ A psychological aspect of identification may involve physical costuming, immersion in aggressive or violent materials, or fantasizing about offending violently. Conversations or writings may indicate a desire to copycat and “one up” previous attackers or assassins.

Novel aggression warning behavior

This is an act of violence which appears unrelated to any “pathway” behavior *and* which is committed for the first time. The person of concern may be engaging in this behavior in order to test his ability to actually engage in a violent act⁵⁵ and it could be thought of as experimental aggression. Examples of acts of novel aggression could include animal cruelty, assault, firearm discharge, arson or bombing, rehearsed violence with inanimate objects fantasized to be human targets, or even vandalism. A threat management team should not discount property crimes as they may be attempts at or first steps of a more serious offense or potentially novel aggression.

Energy burst warning behavior

This is demonstrated by an increased pace, duration, or range of any noted activities related to a potential target, even if the activities themselves seem harmless. These can be overt or stealthy behaviors and have been noted to occur usually in the hours, days, or weeks before a targeted violence incident.⁵⁶ For example, a would-be offender may make more frequent trips, errands, purchases, or communications as he rushes to finalize his plans and settle his affairs prior to an assault.

Leakage

This has been defined as a communication *to a third party* of intent to do harm to a target through an attack.⁵⁷ The leaked information to the third party could be overt: “I am going to kill my classmates tomorrow;” or it may be less direct: “Don’t come to school tomorrow, but watch the news.”⁵⁸ The BAU takes a somewhat broader view of leakage; expressions, whether or not they are communicated to others, which seem to convey thoughts, feelings or intentions to do harm, are all considered leakage. For example, creating an animated video depicting a mass shooting would be concerning behavior, regardless of whether it is posted or shared with others. Leakage can be readily identifiable, self-contained messaging, or more of an accidental or a gradual release of information that reveals clues related to the person’s thoughts, planning, or intentions. Leakage may be more common

in adolescents than in adults,⁵⁹ which may be partially due to factors such as increased impulsivity and more extensive social media use.

When leakage in any form is discovered, it should be recognized as such and not dismissed as fantasy writing or mere venting; it may be fantasy or it may be an indication of something more serious. A full consideration of all facts and circumstances will help threat managers to discern the difference. A comparison could be made to suicide notes: before a suicide has occurred, a note referencing suicide could be dismissed as a cry for help; after the worst has happened, it becomes clear that the note was actually a farewell. Leakage can pose the same challenge and therefore all instances of potential leakage are worthy of thoughtful consideration. The term legacy token has been used to describe an artifact designed to claim credit for a completed targeted violence incident and/or to articulate the motivation behind the violence. Attention should be paid to past tense versus present tense in leakage. If a statement is in the past tense, it could be a sign the person of concern does not see himself in the future, or considers an attack a foregone conclusion, and actually intends to create such a post-attack artifact.

Preventing leakage from becoming a legacy token should be the goal of threat managers. For example, Mr. B posted comments on social media about suicide and killing people. His concerned family called authorities. When interviewed, he told the police it was all a misunderstanding and that he had no plans to hurt anyone or himself. He admitted to having challenges in his social life, but denied any ill intentions. He was articulate, cooperative, and polite, telling police that his family tended to worry too much. The interaction satisfied investigators, who concluded he did not seem to meet criteria for a mental health hold. Mr. B later wrote of feeling profoundly relieved when the investigators left him alone, because if they had searched his room that day they would have found evidence of attack planning. Less than a month later, after posting videos with similar content, he attacked and killed several people on the streets of his community. Some of his pre-attack leakage served to establish a legacy of sorts, informing the world of his grievance and sense of injustice.

Directly communicated threat warning behavior

This is a statement of intended violence made to the target or to others before the act is implemented. The threat may be implicit or explicit, and communicates a wish to harm or kill the target or another person(s). This is often the least common among the warning behaviors; as noted elsewhere in this publication, a logical chain of events begins to unfold once a threat has been made, which poses challenges to the success of a violent plan. Nonetheless, all threats should be taken seriously.

Approach behavior

A person of concern's attempt to gain proximity to a target is considered an approach. Not all approaches are problematic, and individuals may have a legitimate reason for being in proximity to the target. However, an approach may be intended for nefarious purposes such as pre-attack surveillance. The method and means of how an approach is made may be indicative of final acts of preparation, level of energy expended, or escalation. Having protective measures in place may not limit, prohibit, or

prevent approach behavior. Approach behaviors can be exhibited in activities such as trespass, stalking, burglaries, and criminal mischief.

End of life planning

These are terminal behaviors which may or may not be closely associated with the desperation of last resort thinking. Examples include making a will or documenting last wishes, giving away one's possessions, getting one's "house in order," or any other behavior indicating the person of concern may be making arrangements to accommodate the end of his life in the near future.

Last resort warning behavior

This behavior includes communications or actions indicating increasing desperation or distress, or indicating that the person of concern perceives no alternatives to violence. It may include a time or violent action imperative. A time imperative is an expressed sense that time is running out or a deadline is looming.⁶⁰ A violent action imperative is an expressed sense that nonviolent options have evaporated or that violent action is justified.⁶¹ Drastic changes in appearance or personal caretaking may be present, potentially indicating either preparation to act or mental decompensation, or both. Examples have included obtaining large or multiple tattoos with violent imagery and messaging, dramatic weight loss, shaving head hair, cessation of hygiene or suddenly appearing unkempt, or a significant disruption in sleeping or eating patterns. Additional last resort behaviors demonstrating a sense of desperation might include sudden onset of reckless sexual, financial, or other acts that suggest a lack of concern for future consequences.

Indicators of potential imminence

Risk factors and warning behaviors can also assist in gauging imminence, or *how soon* violence may occur. Just as predicting the occurrence of violence is not possible, the same holds true for predicting its timing. However, certain behaviors may indicate a person *of high concern* may be close to acting.

- Energy burst behavior (see page 34)
- End of life planning (see page 35)
- Last resort behavior (see page 36)

- Sudden cessation of medications or other substance use: A person of high concern who normally ingests alcohol, illegal or unconventional substances, or prescription medications, and who suddenly stops doing so could be preparing to act. An individual who discontinues his substance usage may be attempting to become clear-headed and alert, enabling him to focus on and fully experience a violent assault. This differs from a general disinclination to comply with a medication regimen (e.g., stopping medication because "I don't like how it makes me feel").

- Sudden withdrawal from life pattern: In some cases, this behavior could include a sudden retreat to temporary quarters, unexplained absences from work, failure to appear for appointments that would normally be kept, or other signs of withdrawal from life obligations or patterns. This increase in

isolation from others could signal that the person of high concern is in final rehearsals (fantasy-based or actual) or otherwise making final preparations. A place of privacy in which to work and prepare is often needed for a would-be offender to get ready; accordingly, if a person of high concern lives alone, withdrawal from pattern may be unnecessary. Similarly, if a juvenile of high concern is allowed absolute dominion over his bedroom or personal space in the family home, withdrawal from pattern may also be unnecessary because privacy is already assured.

Triggers and stressors

A stressor can be anything in the person of concern's life that causes tension or anxiety. It could be an upcoming review at work, an unhappy home environment, chronic pain, or financial distress. Stressors can be chronic or acute, mild or severe, obvious or hidden. Identifying the stressors affecting the person of concern is an important step in accurately assessing and managing the case. They are threat enhancers and, like risk factors and warning behaviors, are not to be weighted uniformly but rather individually on a case-by-case basis. Generally, the more stressors that exist in a person of concern's life, the more difficult it will be for him to cope. Ascertaining a person's reaction to stressors is as important as identifying the stressors themselves. Persons of concern with greater resilience in response to life's challenges will cope with them better than a brittle person. It is also important to maintain continual awareness, looking out for future stressors and how they may change the assessment and management of the case.

"Triggers" are usually associated with impulsive/reactive violence which is primarily an emotional and defensive response to a threat.⁶² To say that a specific trigger is responsible for a targeted violence incident is to imply the person reacted emotionally and attacked, or "snapped," which is not accurate. Multiple *precipitating events* can build up over a period of time, raising stress levels until the person of concern is susceptible to having a "last straw event."⁶³ Particular attention should be paid to recent material, relational, or status losses in any of these categories: family, intimate/peer, occupational, and self-image.⁶⁴ A brittle person's reaction to the loss, and whether desperation and despair follow, are key points of assessment. Among adolescent and adult mass murderers, significant losses happened to many offenders in the hours, days, or weeks leading up to their violent acts.⁶⁵

The threat management team must always include in its assessment the identification of potential future events which could push a lower concern case to higher concern. Is the person of concern at risk of foreclosure a year down the road? Is his marriage unhappy, creating a risk of divorce on the horizon? The team should adopt a forward-thinking approach and attempt to identify upcoming stressors and precipitating events.

Mitigators

In addition to risk factors, warning behaviors, stressors, and precipitating events, safety stakeholders and threat managers should also identify the protective factors present in a person of concern's life. These protective factors, or threat mitigators, may prevent him from thinking seriously about, or completing, an act of targeted violence. These variables are also termed stabilizers, buffers⁶⁶ or inhibitors.⁶⁷ General types of stabilizers, buffers and inhibitors include:

- Persons, things, or circumstances of sufficient value to the person of concern that reduce the likelihood that he may plan and carry out an act of targeted violence
- Facets of the person himself which enhance his ability to cope with life's trials
- External factors which reduce the risk of planned violence, such as in relation to the target or physical environment

Just as with threat enhancing factors, mitigating factors are not to be weighted uniformly but rather individually on a case-by-case basis. A treasured relationship with one's children, for example, might have greater weight than a multitude of other mitigators or enhancers. Below are examples of threat mitigators commonly evaluated by threat management teams:

- Pursuit of non-violent, legally and socially-sanctioned methods of conflict resolution: Complaints, letters and emails, and habitual initiation of litigation are typically considered threat mitigators. These behaviors demonstrate investment in sanctioned methods of seeking redress for injustice, which therefore suggests that violence is not considered to be the only alternative. A person of concern's complaints, especially when they are constant, can be cumbersome and annoying to address; however, devotion of energy and effort toward leveraging "the system" or communicating openly about grievances may indicate the person is more interested in venting, securing financial compensation, getting an apology, or simply being acknowledged, rather than planning future violence.

Howlers

The BAU occasionally experiences someone who makes repeated threats of violence, and yet *also* pursues non-violent, legally and socially sanctioned methods of conflict resolution at the same time, such as continually filing litigation and complaints. Such a person may be a "howler"⁶⁸ who could be less likely to have violent intent, in that he appears to be invested in lawful, nonviolent processes for obtaining justice. This person's commitment may be to the act of communicating, rather than acting out violently. In all cases, however, concern from a threat assessment and management perspective should arise when a "howler" has failed to achieve his goals, and legally and socially sanctioned methods are exhausted—he could then feel nonviolent options have evaporated.

- Sense of humor: A sense of humor and the ability to laugh, in spite of life's challenges, is considered a mitigator. Laughing reduces negative physiological reactions to stress, and stress-resistant people tend to employ humor or spend time with those who do.⁶⁹ Using humor to cope increases resilience. Review of interviews and investigative information in relation to successful and thwarted targeted violence incidents generally revealed that the offenders did not tend to use humor to cope with challenges.

- Positive, realistic goals: Nurturing of future plans and aspirations is a mitigating factor. Goals, provided they are realistic and healthy, tend to mitigate violence concern because the person has something positive to work toward. As a more practical matter, the establishment of short- and long-term plans and goals suggests the person sees himself existing in the future, which infers the person is not considering suicide or mass homicide.
- Supportive family: At least one family member who supports intervention, sets reasonable limits on behavior, and provides healthy structure and a positive influence, can be a threat mitigator. The more family members who are capable and willing to fill this supportive role, the better.
- Healthy social supports: Having a network of law-abiding friends and/or significant others around, particularly in daily life, is a mitigator. Such positive and healthy social supports act as stabilizing forces in the person's life, buffering against negative feelings which can lead to a need to act out violently. Membership or participation in a church, law-abiding club, or community group can all qualify as mitigators. A special pet can also offer healthy support.
- Positive coping mechanisms: A person of concern who regularly engages in positive activities such as exercise, healthy interests, or a hobby may have acquired an increased capacity to deal with stress if these are outlets unrelated to a grievance or to violence. As long as these outlets do not involve illegal, destructive, or harmful activities, they will generally be considered mitigators.
- Access and receptiveness to assistance: Access *and* receptivity to needed assistance generally reduce concern because aid can often improve quality of life in various ways. Examples include access to mental health or social services, educational or vocational assistance, outreach from family or friends, help for physical or medical conditions, financial assistance with basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter, and any other needs the person may have.
- "On the radar": The mere fact that a person of concern is the focus of an assessment and management process, with buy-in by law enforcement and safety stakeholders, is a good starting point. Active threat assessment and management allows the team to devise and implement strategies to steer the person away from violence. The effectiveness of this mitigator depends heavily on engagement by stakeholders and support from the top down in each organization involved in the process.

Level of concern

The term "risk assessment" can mean different things within different professions, and is used often in various spheres. To physical security specialists, risk equals "threat plus vulnerability." To understand risk of security breach, one must know the threat and identify all vulnerabilities. To investigators, a risk assessment may be a less formal calculation of the probability of an undesirable event. Threat managers may often be asked to assess someone's violence risk. In the mental health profession, "risk assessment" is a technical term; it is an approach to psychological assessment that considers a multitude of factors and behavioral data, usually requiring in-person evaluations in a clinical

setting. All relevant data must be in hand in order to assess risk. These are unlikely to be available to threat managers faced with a need to quickly assess a rapidly changing situation. In the absence of complete information, a “level of concern” assessment can reflect the dynamic nature of warning behaviors, changing circumstances, and the effects of intervention.⁷⁰ Someone may be at high risk for violence, and yet justify varying levels of concern over time depending on what is being observed. The BAU recommends threat management teams think and write in terms of “level of concern,” rather than level of risk. The BAU uses concern levels of low, moderate, elevated, and high, with an additional rating for potential imminence. (See Appendix A)

Once the team has gathered all of the available information, to include threat enhancers, threat mitigators, precipitating events, and other factors, they can begin to assess a level of concern. No magic or mathematical formula exists. Reasonable minds may differ about the importance of one enhancer over another or how many mitigators will outweigh a particularly troubling enhancer. This is why threat managers work best in teams. The consultative process allows for discussion and consensus. Ultimately, a team will arrive at a conclusion on a level of concern and will recommend management strategies based upon the particulars of the case.

Awareness of scrutiny

Expect behavioral changes in the person of concern if he becomes aware of the threat assessment process. Awareness of scrutiny can operate as a mitigator where the person yearns for attention or direction and he finds relief in finally being heard. It can be a reality check for the person of concern, reminding him that any plans for violent action have now been made much more difficult. Or, this awareness can cause the person of concern to engage in impression management, outright deception, acceleration of his plan, or to completely “go dark” and hide behaviors that could alarm

Violence Risk Assessment Tools

Several violence risk assessment tools are commercially available to assist mental health professionals and threat assessors with evaluating the violence potential of a person of concern. Actuarial violence risk assessment tools use an equation, formula, or statistical table to arrive at a mathematical probability of violence or other outcome. They employ quantified predictor variables validated through empirical research to arrive at a risk assessment for violent outcome. Tools that do not use a mathematical approach, but rather focus on qualitative data, are structured professional judgment (SPJ) tools. This method is based on scientific research, training, and experience, and places an emphasis on professional judgment guided by structured assessment tools. Threat assessments derived using SPJ generally examine individual enhancing and mitigating characteristics, with the goal of devising a management strategy that focuses on violence prevention. Finally, unstructured, clinical judgment is also occasionally used but is not the best choice for accurate threat assessments. In that approach, an evaluator assesses violence likelihood unaided by additional materials. Research has demonstrated this method is less accurate than actuarial or SPJ methods.

observers. Added attention might generate feelings of persecution in the paranoid. Depending on the particulars of a threat management strategy implemented for a person of concern, this awareness may be an expected and acceptable circumstance.

Establishing a baseline of behavior prior to awareness of scrutiny, if possible, may be helpful. When change is observed in this baseline behavior, it may be because the person of concern is reacting positively or negatively. For example, if the person has been a prolific online poster but goes quiet after being talked to about his concerning posts, it raises questions. Is the silence attributable to attempts to conceal or has there been a successful deterrent effect? Are there other possible explanations that would explain the change, such as ill health, or perhaps a positive life improvement? As with any behavior, change means *something*, and looking at that change and its meaning is important.

Targeting

Relationship to grievance

With enough information, and sometimes logical deduction, potential targets of a person of concern can often be identified. Additional targets may be actually or symbolically associated with those individuals. Opportunistic victims may be targeted at the time of the offense for any number of reasons, including convenience and availability, high visibility and potential for maximum shock value, or because a desired target is unavailable. In some cases, it may be difficult or impossible to pinpoint a relationship between grievance and targeting, even with the benefit of hindsight. For example, one assailant violently offended against the crowd at a suburban movie theater. No associations between the offender and the theater, or between the offender and any of the 82 casualties, were ever identified.

An offender may target locations rather than specific individuals. Choices can include locations where activity related to a grievance unfolded (e.g. school, workplace, or a shopping mall where a despised class of persons spends time). Other times it is less clear—some offenders have chosen locations where they were successful, perhaps for the last time. Sometimes, the target ultimately selected may not be a first choice, but rather one which is vulnerable and accessible. One offender returned to his old classroom building at his former university and assaulted a class in session with multiple firearms. He had no association with any of his victims. However, he had spent much of a highly successful undergraduate career in that building before beginning a period of repeated life failures. Logically, this targeting may make little sense to the rational observer. However, it apparently made sense to him. While he never articulated a grievance or violent ideation toward the students he hurt and killed, he had demonstrated a cluster of concerning risk factors and warning behaviors before the event. The learning point from a case like this may be that grievance may occasionally not be evident, but nevertheless threat managers should focus on an accelerating pattern of warning behaviors, how those behaviors may be influenced by risk factors, and whether mitigators are available to support the person of concern.

Relationship to psychosis

Psychosis is a severe mental disorder in which both thought and emotion distort reality. It is sometimes the driving factor behind targeted violence, but personality disturbances seem to play more of a role.⁷¹ Nevertheless, caution is advised if one assumes that psychotic individuals will not be able to organize themselves enough to engage in complex and organized behavior. One early study found certain or probable psychosis in two thirds of adult mass murderers, contradicting such an assumption.⁷² Recent research suggests that at least 20% of adult mass murderers were severely mentally ill.⁷³ In the experience of the BAU, and in the observations of researchers, deeply entrenched delusional beliefs can have the effect of focusing and driving pre-attack behaviors and propelling a would-be offender along a pathway toward violently offending.

Although likely representing a minority of cases, psychotic symptoms or disorders can be a primary influencer of target selection. For example, Mr. C drove across the country and engaged in significant violence at the U.S. Capitol. He killed two sworn U.S. Capitol Police (USCP) personnel, acting on his delusional belief that the United States was about to be annihilated by disease and legions of cannibals. After surviving the incident, he later disclosed that he went to the Capitol to gain access to “the ruby satellite,” a device he said was kept in a Senate safe. As a person with paranoid schizophrenia, he was able to plan and carry out cross-country travel, and to engage in successful attack behavior. Mr. C believed the satellite was the key to putting a stop to the cannibalism. It had a means of reversing time, leading him to believe the deaths he caused were “not permanent.” Although he previously communicated his beliefs to others, including multiple governmental agencies, he was unable to secure assistance with his mission to protect himself and the public from harm. In his mind, this forced him to take action on his own.

Even if the beliefs articulated by a person of concern seem clearly delusional, it is important to assess how capable the person may be of acting out violently or how fixated the person is on resolving a grievance. Is the person organized enough to attack? Is the person mobile and does he have access to weapons? Mr. C had a driver’s license, a truck, access to firearms and ammunition, and had traveled several times to multiple federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area.

Family, loved ones, caregivers

Immediate family members residing in the home with a person of concern, caregivers, or anyone close to the person may be possible targets regardless of a seeming absence of grievance towards them. Homicidal violence toward such persons, in tandem with a larger attack, has occurred in too many cases to be overlooked. Motives for these pre-attack homicides range from animosity toward caregivers to wanting to shield them from the aftermath and stigma of the larger attack.

For example, Mr. D experienced lifelong, significant developmental challenges including communication and sensory difficulties and social-emotional problems. He became preoccupied with violence in elementary school, as demonstrated by graphic writings which went largely unaddressed. Crippling anxiety resulted in his placement in homebound education status in middle school. A child psychiatrist evaluated him, recommending intensive educational and therapeutic supports and expert

consultation; these recommendations went largely unheeded. His mother accommodated her son's resistance to medication, therapy and educational support. Mr. D spiraled into a life of isolation with his mother. He became fixated on mass murder, finding validation and support for this obsession from an online pseudo-community of mass murder enthusiasts. Rather than following the recommended care and treatment plan that may have helped Mr. D learn to adjust to the world, his mother created a world that adjusted to him. Her primary strategy was one of accommodation and appeasement, facilitated by a belief that she knew her son better than anyone, including the psychiatrist. Although no one but the offender was responsible for his crimes, opportunities for intervention were lost. The offender first murdered his mother, and went on to kill 20 children and six adults at a local elementary school.

Information gathering

Once a person of concern has been identified, some level of threat assessment, either triage or a 360° assessment, is the next step in determining whether the person might be on a trajectory toward targeted violence. Threat assessment is a highly detailed and nuanced process, often made extremely difficult by sparsely available information. One of the most important tasks in the process is gathering detailed information about a person of concern, the situation, the setting, and to a degree, the target. Both current and historical information is needed to form a complete picture. This section provides insight into the kinds of information assessors may consider seeking. Although there is no such thing as a global checklist to be followed in all cases, this section can serve as a general guide when initially looking at a new case. Once a picture of the person of concern begins to clarify, then specific information gathering decisions should be made. Each matter is highly unique for the simple reason that each human being is highly unique. Information gathering preferences must be determined for each case anew, taking into account the particular case under consideration.

Threat assessment teams will also have to accept that it will be the rare case indeed in which all desired information is available and no questions are left unanswered. Knowledge gaps are an unfortunate reality of threat assessment. It is critically important to gather as much information as possible, although sometimes information will simply not be available by any means. Sometimes it will be unavailable due to legal or logistical impediments, but generally speaking there is very often a great deal of information which can be accumulated in furtherance of truly understanding what is happening with a person of concern. Preliminary assessments can sometimes be offered pending development of additional information.

Assessments must be based upon fact, and if this caution is not heeded they can be distorted by assumption, speculation, and guess work. Patience is often required while research and investigation are conducted to fill in any data gaps. Inevitably, however, these gaps will occur. When they do, assessors must do the best they can without, to the extent possible, making assumptions. Partial or preliminary assessments should include caveats that indicate the information is incomplete. All should be aware of the "silo effect;"⁷⁴ data gaps may result when stakeholders do not share their information with one another. For example, if a law enforcement entity involved in a case does not share its information regarding the person of concern with the corresponding mental health institution,

important information could be missing when a critical mental health evaluation takes place, which could in turn result in less effective treatment.

When a question is asked and cannot be answered, for example if mental health records at three hospitals are known to exist but are not available through consent or other lawful means, then a threat assessment team knows and understands it has a significant information gap in the case. This is a known unknown—the team is aware that it does not have a piece of information. The advantage here is that the team knows about the gap and can try to address it through other means (e.g., interviews of past associates or loved ones could reveal facts and observations that might fill in that gap).

Another important gap is the unknown unknown—a facet of the case which the team is not even aware exists. An example would be when a threat management team knows a person of concern had been hospitalized for psychiatric care in the local community, but had no idea he had also been hospitalized twice more in the past, in distant states. The facts and circumstances of those treatment periods could be important. Did episodes of violent or threatening conduct lead to them? Were family members involved with the commitment process and therefore are potential allies in the current situation? Thorough information gathering greatly reduces the risk of unknown unknowns.

Gathering information could be somewhat intrusive into a person of concern's life and therefore a respectful approach is a must. Collecting some kinds of information may also require legal process or consent, though many privacy laws allow for disclosure of records when necessary to avert imminent violence. Although finding information is not always easy, it is also unwise to rely upon superficial data, to intentionally decide not to fill information gaps, or to disengage and do nothing. Therefore, a robust but respectful information gathering stage of inquiry is recommended before a threat assessment is conducted. It is important to put the behavior of concern into the greater context of the person's life by gathering information. Striking a balance between privacy and public safety is essential. However, a level of intrusiveness may sometimes be necessary in order to be thorough, accurate and fair.

The following behaviorally relevant information has been found helpful in targeted violence threat assessment, and can be gathered from interviews, open source research and records collection. It is by no means a comprehensive list meant to identify every potential source of information. Below, in "Data sources," information types and sources are identified. Next in "Relevance of data," further explanation about the relevance of these sources is offered. Threat assessors are cautioned against a tendency to focus only on details which support concern for violence rather than all details which include threat mitigators (See pages 21-23, "Bias").

Data sources

- Law enforcement and military
 - Criminal history and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) offline searches,^c emergency and non-emergency calls for service related to the person of concern or his residence, non-arrest police reports
 - Military service records, if any
- Education and workplace
 - School records, including attendance, academic performance, disciplinary or counseling records and notes, writing or other expressive class assignments, interviews with teachers and other staff who personally interacted with or observed the person of concern, or any other information relevant to behavior
 - Employment and personnel records, to include attendance, disciplinary or counseling records, interviews with supervisors and coworkers, performance records, or any other information relevant to behavior
- Medical and mental health
 - Medical and mental health records, including notes by care providers
 - Interactions with social services agencies
 - Substance use or abuse, to include doctor-prescribed medications, over-the-counter medications and supplements, recreational substance use including alcohol and illicit drugs, and unconventional substances (e.g., bath salts)
 - Participation in substance treatment, behavioral treatment or other rehabilitation programs
- Expressions
 - Correspondence, particularly to/from any identified potential victims, to include electronic mail messages, letters, notes, poems, song lyrics, text messages, or graffiti
 - Journals, notes, other writings regarding topics of interest to the person of concern, especially including those which raise concerns about potential violence, although safety stakeholders are reminded that evidence of mitigators can also be found in writings
 - All online presence and activity, to include social media, blogging, research, business or professional activity
- Life and relationships
 - Nature and quality of family and social relationships
 - Descriptions of interactions with others, both when the person of concern is satisfied and dissatisfied
 - Living situation, to include cohabitants and the nature/quality of relationships with them, nature of residence and upkeep, whether residence is also used for other purposes
 - Habits, routines, opinions and views of the person of concern
 - Memberships, religious views and practice if any, hobbies and pastimes

^cCriminal history and NCIC offline information is typically available only to law enforcement agencies. Therefore, sharing of specifics from such reports with other members of a threat assessment team may be limited.

- Movies, television shows, video games, books and magazines, including how much time and energy is devoted to particular favorites
- Financial situation and status, as evidenced by purchasing patterns, income and losses
- Other
 - Personal electronic devices (e.g., computers, phones, game consoles, cameras, flash drives)
 - Weapons access and familiarity, attempts to access weapons, target practice and shooting club membership, concealed carry permits and ownership registration

Relevance of data

- Criminal history, NCIC offline searches, non-arrest law enforcement agency reports: A criminal history provides insight into a person's level of respect for laws, boundaries and limits, as well as his comfort level with negative behaviors. It may also offer insight into what a person considers to be taboo versus acceptable behavior. Interactions with law enforcement may offer insight into whether a person respects and complies with authority, and his attitude toward law enforcement. Contacts that did not necessarily result in arrest can be excellent sources of this insight, as well. Past recorded contacts may provide abundant direction regarding behavior management. As the best indicator of future behavior is often past behavior, it is important to know whether a person has engaged in past violence, and if so, what kind of violence. Defensive violence in a bar fight is much different from walking up to a coworker and punching him in the face. Not all violence may appear in a criminal history report, so it is important to ask those individuals who know the person well if he has exhibited any violent behavior in the past. Past violent behavior may also be documented in non-arrest related police reports and school records. Criminal investigation reports will usually detail behaviors which can only be inferred by a "rap sheet."
- Military records: Military records provide insight into a person's experience with firearms, offensive/defensive tactics, and other special skills relevant to the ability to plan and carry out an act of targeted violence. As personnel files, they can provide data related to training and certifications; commendations; mental and physical health diagnoses, treatment and care; leadership; ability to obey authority; disciplinary issues; discharge summaries; and other behavior-rich details.
- School or employment records: These records, while sometimes shielded from threat assessment team review by privacy considerations, can supply many kinds of relevant information. Patterns of emotional decline or improvement over time can be observed via performance, attendance, or behavioral changes if records are available for a lengthy period. Whether or not the school or job has a positive effect on the person, or if the job or school is a source of a grievance, may be detected. Clues to targeting, research and planning, preparation, emotional leakage, and more could potentially be found in such records.

➤ **Medical history:** These records can provide insight into injuries, chronic and acute illness, pain, treatment successes and failures, specialist referrals and more. All of these can represent enhancers and mitigators for consideration during the assessment process. Frequency of medical consultation and treatment can also offer clues to a person's level of receptivity to assistance and intervention. Regarding medication history, dosages, route of ingestion, frequency, side effects, and drug interactions could all affect behavior, emotions, and mental processing and may increase paranoid or depressed thoughts which may subsequently lead to violent action. For medications prescribed to help with an existing mental or emotional disorder, it is important to note whether the person is complying with the prescription. A general medical doctor or a psychiatrist may be consulted where necessary for assistance with understanding the effects substances may have on the person of concern's behavior and thought processes.

Head Trauma

Although not directly correlated with predatory violence, a history of head injury may be of interest because it does correlate with general violence risk factors, such as increased impulsivity, increased alcohol use, relationship instability, or others. The BAU has experienced cases in which head injury raises concern for impulsive or reactive violence in persons of concern. For example, a person of concern with a history of serious head injuries and demonstrated impulse control issues may not be at increased risk for planning a predatory attack *because of* the head injury history, but he could be at increased risk for impulsively harming a target when interactions do occur.

➤ **Mental health history and diagnosis:** Information about a person's mental health, declines and improvements (and what may have precipitated them), suicidal and/or homicidal ideation, medications, specific treatments that were successful and unsuccessful, notes about the person of concern's feelings about treatment, and prognosis for the future are all potentially revealed in these records. Treatment successes or failures may inform an assessment and assist in identifying effective threat management strategies.

➤ **Expressions:** Persons of concern may provide clues about their grievances in their expressions. Identification of a grievance can help pinpoint potential fixations. It can also offer clues about what threat management strategies might be successful, in that the grievance could be a solvable, or at least reducible, problem. If threat managers are able to understand what thoughts and feelings are driving the person of concern, they are that much closer to figuring out how to prevent violence from occurring. A person of concern may express that violence is an, or perhaps *the*, acceptable method of conflict resolution. Expressed violent ideations can also offer hints about targeting, means of potential attack, or other vital clues to the thoughts and plans of a person of concern. Threat managers should explore past or present suicidality and statements of hopelessness ("I see no way out"), as well as homicidal ideation. Social media platforms should be examined to identify the content, frequency, and type of social media use by the person of concern (See pages 49-50 "Social media and the Internet").

- Life and relationships: Details of living situation and life pattern are important. They may help identify others who could provide stability and support, or who could make the situation worse. If the person of concern lives alone, that privacy may afford isolation needed to plan and prepare to engage in violence. Residential instability is a stressor that can add to a person's burden and be a drain on coping skills. An unstable residential history could be representative of unstable personal relationships, financial stressors, unresolved mental health concerns, or other problems. Life pattern is also important. First, it will help threat managers know when the person begins to deviate or withdraw from that pattern. Additionally, knowledge of eating, sleeping, and social interaction patterns are helpful for assessing general stability and physical and mental well-being. The person of concern's financial resources should be taken into consideration because they may affect the ability to carry out a plan of targeted violence. Access to money increases the ability to purchase weapons and other gear needed for an assault, to travel, or to fund other logistical needs. Access to money could also be used in a positive manner, for example to finance hobbies or positive interests, to spend time with loved ones, to gain independence from toxic influences, or simply to enjoy life. Additionally, financial losses and hardships may be significant stressors in a person's life and should be considered in assessing current and future violence concern.
- Preoccupation with targeted violence: Many targeted violence offenders have demonstrated a preoccupation with past incidents. Quoting from other offenders, keeping statistics about notorious events, and a general captivation with violence, particularly targeted violence, all suggest a preoccupation. It may also reveal clues about potential assault methods if the person of concern has a particular interest in several events with commonalities between them. For example, if a person of concern is most interested in previous offenders who used or tried to use improvised explosive devices, then it could be that the person of concern is interested in doing the same thing.
- Weapon access and familiarity: This aspect of assessment directly relates to capacity to engage in targeted violence.
- Other: Personal electronic devices (e.g., computers, phones, game consoles, cameras, flash drives) may all hold information specifically relevant to threat assessment, such as evidence of research, planning and preparation, leakage, identification of grievances and violent ideations, and more.

Interviews

Interviews of the person of concern and those who know him can provide a wealth of information regarding the person and his motivations, plans, and risk for violence. Family members, co-workers, employers, friends, students attending the same educational institution, and others could all potentially assist threat managers who are engaged on a case. Traditional "crime-solving" interviews can be somewhat ineffective in identifying violence concern or vulnerability to violence risk, particularly where no crime has been committed. As with any investigative interview, however, interviewees may leave out crucial information because they believe the information is not important, is embarrassing, or can get them into trouble. The goal of many threat assessment interviews is to obtain a complete "360

degree,” or a complete biological, psychological, and social portrait of the person. The information presented in this guide can help with appropriately structuring these interviews.

Records

Records can be a source of valuable information about current and past behaviors exhibited by a person of concern. Threat managers should collect as many relevant records as possible and should have knowledge of privacy laws and confidentiality protections in order to properly obtain them. Like all case information, they should be properly protected once obtained.

Open source

Open source searches for the person of concern can identify additional family members and associates, past residences, current roommates, financial/employment information, firearm ownership, vehicle information, and electronic mail (email) addresses used by the person. Social media reviews can reveal current and past activity, assist in identifying a grievance, and identify additional friends and acquaintances, travel plans, interests or hobbies, and more.

Social media and the internet

The importance of the role of social media in threat assessment and management cannot be overstated. It saturates daily life for many people during all waking hours. Social media can be accessed on smart phones, computers and televisions, and now by wearable technology. Live internet streaming is as much a part of everyday life for some as buying groceries. It is imperative that threat management teams have on staff, or have access to, someone with cyber skills and social media acumen. Some obvious examples of current social media options which often come up in threat assessment cases include: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Google+; new services are created every week and may be more generation-specific. Weblog (“blog”) and commerce sites may also reveal information about a person of concern. A complete list of options would likely be impossible to catalog as the possibilities seem nearly infinite and are ever-changing. For persons of concern in any age group, it may be advisable to consult with someone in an equivalent age, social sphere, and community, for insight into which social media

Privacy Laws

Understanding the laws protecting privacy rights of individuals is important for threat management teams. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and federal and state privacy acts are primary examples. They can be complex and time consuming to digest, but doing so is a must. A common perception appears to be that record holders must choose between blowing the whistle and risking a lawsuit, or remaining silent and risking a disaster. The reality is that privacy laws can comfortably accommodate both interests; they limit, but do not prohibit, disclosure of information to law enforcement and threat assessment teams. For example, exceptions often allow disclosure of protected information when necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to health or safety. Additionally, stakeholders should remember a person of concern always has the option of consenting to disclosure. Teams should maintain a source of expertise regarding applicable privacy laws.

platforms may be in use. However this task is accomplished, it is important that it *is* accomplished. Social media offers an often unparalleled view into the thoughts, feelings, plans and intentions of a person of concern. Social media leakage may initially be unknown to investigators, particularly where pseudonyms are used in place of a person's true name. However, once it is located it can be a very effective source of information regarding the person's mindset and future plans. Social media review should begin as soon as a case is opened, and continue until concerns are abated.

A study of targeted violence incidents at schools revealed that in over 75% of the cases studied at least one person had information that the offense was being planned. Most were peers, such as a friend, a schoolmate, or a sibling.⁷⁵ Some peers knew about the plan because the offender "leaked" it. Leakage on social media could take the form of writings, images, videos, and even "likes." An example of social media leakage occurred in a European case. Hours before a 2011 assault on a youth camp, the offender posted a video online which appeared to advocate violence toward specific religious and political groups. About 90 minutes before his offense, he posted a 1,500+ page "manifesto" online, describing two years of preparation for violence. It is worth noting that neither of these posts included a direct threat.

Online, one can readily find support and validation for even the most violent ideas and plans; for those who wish to remain anonymous the internet can offer that protection. The dominance of the internet and online life has led to the evolution of a "pronoid pseudocommunity"⁷⁶ of people who are fascinated with targeted violence incidents or even endorse them. Pronoia is a converse of paranoia: a delusional belief that others are saying good things about the pronoid person.⁷⁷ In the emotional safety of this virtual environment, the person of concern finds a home of sorts in a pseudocommunity—he can discover mutual agreement and encouragement for his feelings about himself, others, his grievance and more, no matter how abhorrent those ideas may be. Attachments formed within the pseudocommunity can replace real world ones, particularly when online friends offer validation when "real" people refuse to do so. This can foster increased senses of grandiosity and power, both of which may contribute to a sense of entitlement to engage in violence.

Another concept related to online activity is disinhibition, which is a lack of restraint demonstrated by disregard for social norms and poor ability to assess risk. Disinhibited individuals may say and do things online they would not normally do when others are able to observe them. They can easily research and view anything online without consequence. The internet is a place of infinite links, where one can burrow down through multiple sites by clicking on appealing topic after topic in a sort of "rabbit hole" effect. Some individuals may be trolling the internet and viewing violent material simply for entertainment. Some may be searching for a satisfying fantasy. A few may be looking for ideas for a plan of violence. Social media and the internet provide ease of access which can in turn accelerate violent ideation into planning or action.

Chapter 4 Management: The Prevention Plan

The recommendations contained in this chapter derive from the experience and perspective of the BAU and the symposium participants. They include passive and active strategies geared toward preventing violence and contain many valuable and actionable suggestions for threat managers. Although the intake and assessment processes are generally standardized, management plans should be unique in most instances.

Once a level of concern has been assessed in a case, the next step is management. Recognizing a threat or a concern for violence is only the beginning; doing something about it is what may change the course of events. Threat management is a carefully planned intervention or series of interventions focused around the person of concern, potential targets, the situation and/or the setting in which violence could occur. Effecting change with regard to one or more of these domains may change the course of events in a positive way. In this chapter, threat management is addressed from various standpoints, including identifying several threat management techniques which have proven successful.

Unfortunately, increasingly sparse resources and a high volume of service calls make it difficult for law enforcement agencies to expand their scope beyond enforcing criminal laws. Most are stretched thin as it is. Diverting time and energy away from criminal behavior to focus on preventing a possible event may not be the easiest leadership decision to make. It is sometimes a necessary one, however. Threat management is about diverting direction of interest, diminishing dangerous and concerning behaviors, and altering a trajectory toward targeted violence.

Safety and caretaking

Protecting public safety and caring for persons of concern are heavily intertwined. Successful management strategies embrace this reality; focusing on one of these aspects at the expense of the other is potentially hazardous. Threat management teams exist primarily to protect public safety. This is accomplished in large part through interventions intended to improve a person of concern's well-being, always keeping in mind that public safety is the ultimate goal. All recommendations for action by the threat management team, even arrest or hospitalization, should be implemented in a respectful manner. Stakeholders should ensure the person's dignity is maintained; perceived loss of dignity may only fuel or create a new grievance. Potential consequences of planned interventions should always be considered before action is taken. Public safety may be enhanced when the person's well-being is improved and the grievance is addressed; both of these strategies attempt to prevent violence at its root.

Assumption of responsibility

Once a person of concern is identified, it is important that stakeholders take ownership of the case. The threat management team will be comprised of representatives from various entities; these entities are responsible for ultimate management. See Chapter 5 for recommendations regarding team logistics and functioning.

Threat management can be short-term or long-term, with an open case ranging in duration from days to years. Some cases that may initially seem to be short-term may ultimately turn out to be long-term. They may appear to be resolved, only to require reassessment at a later date as new facts and circumstances emerge. When assuming responsibility for a long-term case, a team could end up feeling exhausted, overwhelmed and desensitized. After a management plan has been initiated, the responsibility of the team and its members, and responsible stakeholders, does not stop. The plan must be seen through, continually reassessed and adjusted as necessary. If a person of concern moves to another jurisdiction, the case and all relevant information should be transferred in a responsible manner; thorough transfer briefings and follow-up are recommended.

Accurate and effective communication to determine ownership and responsibility will serve all involved teams and organizations well. However, sharing information for the sole purpose of 'passing the buck' is not effective threat management, and may even constitute irresponsible handling of the case. An entity attempting to pass responsibility for a case may be the most logically responsible whether it wants to be or not. It could be dangerous to hand off a case without ensuring the receiving entity understands the gravity of the situation and everything that has transpired up to the point of transfer. For example, one community threat assessment team has a practice which ensures seamless transition of cases within its region. If the school district team is managing a student of concern who leaves the school system, that case automatically transfers to the community's adult threat assessment team for continued assessment and management. If the person of concern leaves the jurisdiction, the case is responsibly transferred to the appropriate threat assessment team or law enforcement agency in the new jurisdiction.

Another potential pitfall is concluding that a case is over when the person of concern is fired, expelled, or otherwise removed from the immediate situation. This is simply not so. There may be little to stop a fired employee from returning to the work site, going to the residence of a targeted coworker, or appearing at a public venue favored by other employees. An expelled former student can easily return to campus, to the home of another student or staff member, or to some other location where targets may be found. Further, removing a person of concern from the field of view in this way creates a blind spot. Once threat managers' optics on the person is lost, there is no way to know if the person is escalating. While sometimes necessary, dismissal from the setting is not a threat management strategy in itself. Ironically, once a person is barred from a place, more planning for safety is often needed or strongly recommended.

A notable case in which removal from the setting did not prevent violence was that of Student E. He was a troubled young man attending high school and he exhibited many risk factors and warning signs concerning his environment and upbringing, family, mental health, and education. After he began demonstrating concerning behaviors, school administrators referred him for homeschooling. He murdered his grandfather and his grandfather's companion before returning to school and killing seven people and injuring five others. He committed suicide before he could be apprehended by the police. Unfortunately, removing Student E from the school setting did not prevent him from offending. It did, however, shield his behaviors from visibility, further his isolation and estrangement from peers and

caring adults, and offer him enhanced free time and privacy in which to plan and initiate acts of targeted violence.

In a workplace example, Mr. F was hired and quickly became known as a problem employee. He had interpersonal conflicts with everyone with whom he worked and always blamed others for his problems; his coworkers were very uncomfortable around him and felt threatened. Mr. F was dismissed less than a year after he was hired because of volatile behavior. He yelled at co-workers after learning of his firing and refused to leave the building; police had to escort him out. The company provided security to the staffers for a time after the incident, and directed them to call 9-1-1 if he ever returned to the property. Mr. F filed numerous legal complaints against his employer, all of which were ultimately dismissed based on lack of evidence. More than two years after he was fired, Mr. F took revenge by shooting to death two former colleagues and hours later took his own life. In his suicide note he wrote that he was influenced and provoked by other shooters who had made the news in previous months.

When feasible, organizations, safety stakeholders, and threat management teams should consider maintaining access to the person of concern and retaining an optic on his behavior before and after expulsion, termination of employment, or other form of removal from the environment. Otherwise, a blind spot could be created, limiting a team's ability to effectively gather intelligence and take the appropriate actions necessary to prevent an act of violence.

Prevention, not prediction

Threat managers are not psychics and they cannot predict the future. Just as a targeted violence event cannot be predicted, the perfect threat management solution cannot be foreseen. The threat assessment and threat management relationship is one of continuous reassessment and modification. If one management strategy is not working as planned, the next steps are to reassess, modify the plan, and try again. Rarely is there only one solution for each case. The alternative is to do nothing, fail to adjust, and wait to see what happens. Unfortunately, making such a choice may only allow a bad situation to become worse.

When an act of targeted violence occurs, hindsight becomes easy. Once an act of violence has been perpetrated, the offender's situation, grievance, and violent ideation can seem obvious. Without the benefit of hindsight, however, threat managers cannot know at what point an intervention would have been effective. Prevention, therefore, is best approached in a holistic way. Thinking about the person of concern, the target, the situation and the setting in their totality increases the odds of preventing tragedy. To use an example from medicine, a cardiologist can identify patients at high risk for a cardiac event. The doctor cannot, however, predict which particular patient will have a heart attack. He knows the risk factors—high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, family history, poor diet, and no exercise—and can help the patient manage these. However, he cannot know which patient would have had a heart attack without management of risk factors. This is prevention without prediction. A similar principle applies in threat assessment and management. Effecting thoughtful and

well-planned changes can stabilize a volatile situation and reduce violence concern in the absence of an ability to foretell the future.

Management spectrum options

Multiple, concurrent management strategies are almost always appropriate. One suggestion is to identify potential strategies from each discipline represented on the threat management team; each member should look to his or her own resources to evaluate what can be leveraged toward managing the case. Signs of deterioration can be viewed as opportunities for intervention. If mental decompensation seems to be happening, is commitment or at least a mental health violence risk assessment possible? When a firearm is possessed by a juvenile, is juvenile prosecution an option?

There is no “one size fits all” approach to threat management. Instead, a threat management team should focus on case-specific, creative solutions based upon communication, partnerships, and leveraging of resources. Flexibility is the key. Options include, but are not limited to, the following:

Person of concern

➤ Take no further action at this time: This is a deliberate threat management option based upon articulable facts that justify the decision to take no action. This decision should rest on an assessment that the person of concern poses minimal or no risk at that particular time. This is not a strategy or solution for not knowing how to proceed.

In one case example, Student G wrote an assigned class essay about “my future career,” detailing an aspiration to become an assassin. The case received attention due to a zero tolerance policy which prohibited violently themed material. A review of the essay strongly suggested it was purely fanciful in nature. Further, exploration of the student’s personal history revealed no threat enhancers and many mitigators. When interviewed, Student G responded with surprise and annoyance that his essay was taken seriously, which was consistent with this student’s normal attitude that life should not be taken too seriously. The BAU recommended no further action be taken on the case at that time.

➤ Watch and wait: A watch and wait strategy is used when someone *may* be a person of concern, but insufficient information is available upon which to base a complete assessment or implement more active management strategies. Watch and wait can include observation of the person of concern’s online and in-person behaviors. This option can be implemented in conjunction with any threat management plan as a way to continuously gather information and observe changes in behavior.⁷⁸

In one case example, Mr. H had a long history of harassing behavior and set his sights on the CEO of a large company. Mr. H authored a steady stream of harassing emails and letters to the CEO, demanding money in exchange for ideas he claimed were stolen from him. The BAU assessed Mr. H posed a low level of concern for targeted violence. Wishing the harassment to stop, the CEO requested that law enforcement interview and admonish Mr. H. The BAU’s opinion was that an admonishment

would likely be ineffective; from a threat management perspective such an admonishment might elevate Mr. H's grievance with the company and could cause him to believe that the FBI was in collusion with the company against him. Unless and until Mr. H's communications suggested imminence such as evaporating patience or that his opportunity to attack was narrowing, the BAU recommended Mr. H be allowed to vent, and that stakeholders should wait to see if any escalation occurred.

In another example, Mr. I was fired from his job, lost a child custody dispute, and had been arrested twice within six months for non-violent offenses. Police found notes which he kept on current events including a recent act of targeted violence. During an interview with law enforcement, Mr. I was very inquisitive and questioned why police were making something out of nothing. Results of a search warrant on Mr. I's phone appeared to corroborate his explanation that he was interested in current events rather than conducting research and attack planning. Mr. I had begun searching for new employment and filed an appeal of the child custody decision. A preliminary assessment yielded no evidence of a grievance, warning behaviors, an identified target, or any suggestion of time or violent action imperatives. The BAU assessed that Mr. I posed a low level of concern for targeted violence, and recommended passive monitoring, including review of publically-accessible social media accounts to remain aware of any changes or escalation in his communications.

➤ Third-party monitoring: Third party monitoring involves identifying and enlisting a reliable and discreet individual to assist threat managers. This third party could be a family member, friend, co-worker, probation officer, or anyone who has regular contact with the person of concern. Ideally this individual will act as a supportive listener who discourages negative or violent thoughts and who acts as a positive influence. An ideal third party monitor is liked, trusted, and cognizant of the person's ups and downs. A third-party monitor is someone who will not reveal threat managers' interest unless agreed-upon, and will keep threat managers apprised of developments with the person of concern.

For example, Mr. J had a lengthy criminal history and used social media to post graphic photos of mutilated and dismembered bodies, as well as information regarding targeted violence and mass murder. He also had a long history of substance abuse as well as mental illness. When his parental rights were terminated, he developed a grievance against various persons involved in this decision. In addition to other measures, the BAU recommended the introduction of a third party monitor. Due to Mr. J's reclusive nature, he had very few friends or family members with whom he was close. He did, however, have rapport with a neighbor who was deemed to be responsible and discreet. This neighbor was recruited to gently monitor Mr. J for signs of escalation or changes in behavior, allowing threat managers to unobtrusively retain awareness.

➤ Third-party intervention: In this variation, the third-party monitor is also positioned, and safely able, to provide more active assistance in managing the person of concern by various means. Examples may include helping to ensure the person gets to outpatient treatment appointments or actively discouraging violent thinking or planning.

Student K was an isolated 15-year-old who was arrested for making threats. He attempted to purchase an assault weapon and body armor online, and expressed an interest in violent groups. He developed a grievance against the police who arrested him and talked about attacking them. Student K's adoptive mother did not take his behavior seriously and his adoptive father was largely absent. The BAU recommended a third party intervention strategy, with a particular emphasis on caretaking, to try to manage Student K away from purchasing weapons and ammunition. He liked and respected a track coach at his high school, who was willing to engage with Student K, discourage him from violence, and serve as a supportive listener. The coach invited Student K to work with the track team as an assistant, giving him an outlet for his time and the opportunity to be a productive member of the school community. This management technique worked extremely well. Student K felt someone was finally listening to and caring for him. He gradually became disinterested in retaliation against the police and more focused on a positive future.

➤ Direct interview: An interview with the person of concern can be structured in various ways to serve different purposes. Goals of an interview could include:

- Gathering information about grievance, motivations, plans, the identity of additional interview contacts, and more
- Redirecting the person of concern away from any known targets and away from violence
- Offering appropriate assistance
- Delivering an admonishment against further negative behaviors
- Serving as an effective deterrent, in that it reveals to the person that his behavior has been noticed

Threat managers should be mindful that the interview could also cause the person of concern to begin hiding his behaviors. Exit interviews to gather information following terminations or expulsions can be particularly effective counterbalancing techniques to offset the loss of visibility once the person is removed from the immediate environment. Like any management technique, direct contact with the person of concern must always be carefully considered in terms of costs and benefits, particularly risk of aggravating the situation.

Mr. L was an employee for a large international company who was terminated for sexual harassment and inappropriate emails. Mr. L respected a court's order prohibiting further contact with the victim of his harassment and prohibiting physical approach to the company's property. Six months later, he began emailing another employee to complain about the victim, who filed a sexual harassment civil suit. He also complained about the company's unfairness in terminating him and emailed the employee a photograph of a firearm. The company became concerned that Mr. L might be considering an act of targeted violence. He had no known history of violence but did have an alcohol dependence issue. The BAU recommended an interview strategy of trying to convince him to relinquish his firearms, to seek psychological counseling, and to attend treatment for alcohol dependence; alcohol use was suspected of exacerbating his menacing and harassing behavior. Mr. L could not afford counseling, so the company offered to pay for it to assist him in becoming well. Social services and employment

counseling were also offered. Mr. L was receptive to the interview and assistance strategy, and as a result his threatening and harassing behavior ceased once he began to feel better.

➤ **Administrative actions:** These actions can include probation, suspension, expulsion, or other restrictions. Strict adherence to policies which prohibit bad behavior and provide for discipline are often a must, as habitual violation of limits and boundaries without enforcement may encourage additional bad behavior. Care should be taken to avoid creating another grievance if possible. In cases where expulsion or other removal from the environment is implemented, that entity should contact the appropriate authorities or a counterpart, such as law enforcement or a new school, and share information needed to continue effective threat management. An interview should be conducted, if feasible, to identify the person's plans and reaction to the administrative action. Regardless of the action chosen, preserving dignity should be a top priority in all interactions. Alternatives such as voluntary leave, perhaps due to medical or mental health concerns, with defined standards and conditions for return, may also be considered.

Student M was a good student who held several leadership roles in high school. However, he held a grudge for being ridiculed by other students and believed he was being persecuted by his teachers because of his sexual orientation and his racial origin. Student M authored an assigned essay about a character, who endured difficulties in school and felt betrayed by others. The paper outlined a scenario wherein this character brought a gun to school and shot multiple people, who were presumed to be actual students and faculty, before committing suicide. In response, the school told Student M he could graduate early and avoid expulsion by completing certain requirements, which included no access to firearms, no contact with school staff, and a mental health evaluation. He adhered to all conditions and was making college and career plans. Independently, local law enforcement filed misdemeanor criminal charges for disorderly conduct in relation to the essay. The BAU opined Student M posed a low level of concern for violence and that criminal charges may compromise his future and fuel his grievance. The district attorney's office offered Student M the option of entering a pretrial diversion program provided he sign another contract whereby he agreed to refrain from conduct that would result in his arrest for three years. These contracts established boundaries and served as reminders to Student M that he would be held accountable for any future bad behavior. He went on to college and successfully completed his education without incident.

In another example, Mr. N published a novel that very closely tracked real events in his life and which described a character who engaged in a workplace attack after being fired from his job. His narrative had a fantasy rehearsal quality to it, and its characters were easily identified as real-life co-workers. The graphic detail and carefully planned attack described in Mr. N's writings raised concerns that he could be considering violence himself. In the actual workplace, he appeared to "get away with" a considerable amount of bad behavior. He had been formally warned on two occasions for openly disregarding policy and supervisory instructions, and behaving disrespectfully. The BAU recommended that his employer discipline him for writing the novel as violating company policy prohibiting threatening or menacing behavior. Disciplining him set boundaries and limits on his behavior, and

communicated to him that he could not act in any manner he wished. The BAU recommended he be asked to sign a behavioral contract that clearly outlined expectations and consequences for bad behavior, which would be strictly enforced. Once Mr. N realized his behavior had to change or he risked losing his job, he stopped threatening and intimidating other employees. Continuing observation was, however, recommended for a period of time following stabilization of the situation.

- Civil actions: Options vary according to jurisdiction but include trespass warnings, restraining orders, and orders of protection, all sought under the authority of the court. Specificity in these orders is very important and should include clear boundaries, prohibitions, and consequences or legal implications for violations. Violations of a judge's order should be strictly enforced in a professional manner that preserves the dignity of the person of concern but reinforces the importance of abiding by boundaries. Threat management teams should recognize that civil orders may have the potential to inflame the person further and should thus carefully consider the implications of such action. The decision to pursue a civil order rests solely with the person or organization seeking the order.
- Criminal enforcement: These actions include arrest and prosecution under appropriate local, state, and/or federal laws, to include revocations of probation. Threat management teams should recognize that these options may have the potential to inflame the person further and should thus carefully consider the implications of such action. If criminal enforcement is chosen, further coordination and appropriate information sharing—with victims, mental health professionals, prosecutors and defense counsel, the court, pretrial services, the incarceration facility, probation and parole services—is essential. Some crimes appear simple at first glance, such as trespass, but may in reality be indicators of more complex and concerning behavior. There may be a difference between the crime committed and the violation charged, and it is imperative to understand the context of each violation before deciding on everything from charging decisions through post-conviction considerations. Each step is an opportunity to apply threat management strategies.
- Setting specific boundaries and limits: Threatening behavior is behavior that would cause a person of ordinary sensibilities to fear injury or harm. It is not limited to communication; physical actions intended to intimidate others are threatening as well. When ignored, these behaviors can escalate to more serious problems. Someone who engages in harassment, intimidation, bullying, or making threats may be doing so with intention, and the behavior may be repeated as long as it is [a] effective in supplying the person with something he wants, or [b] not stopped by an authority with the power to do so. A commonly used technique which assists with both assessment and management is setting specific boundaries and limits tailored to an individual situation and any particular threatening behaviors. As an assessment/reassessment technique, there is value in watching to see what the person of concern's reaction is to a limit that has been set. As a management technique, setting limits on behavior often works well, and the person of concern learns from that moment onward that bad behavior has consequences and will not be tolerated.

➤ 100% Enforcement: Total enforcement of all rules, limits, boundaries, laws, and orders can be effective in many cases to get a person of concern “in check” when he has established a pattern of bad behavior without consequence or challenge. As with any management strategy, 100% enforcement should only be implemented after a thorough assessment has been conducted. First, it may not be a wise approach for some volatile, psychotic, or paranoid persons of concern. Second, as noted later in this chapter, “zero tolerance” policies as blanket rules are not always suitable.

Mr. O had a pattern of harassing, stalking, and threatening a police sergeant and others, related to his perception that the sergeant had failed to investigate a case to his satisfaction. He also believed that various persons in his community were conspiring against him. Mr. O had been hospitalized numerous times, had a known history of methamphetamine use, and wrote frequent letters, blogs, and made videos about his complaints and conspiracy theories. He had an outstanding warrant for a stalking-related offense. Among the threat management strategies recommended were consistent and immediate enforcement related to all violations of the law, and arresting him on the outstanding warrant as soon as possible. The BAU also recommended that, because he demonstrated a degree of paranoia, police be as transparent as possible with him at all times, such as clearly outlining the exact procedures they would follow during and after his arrest.

➤ Mental health commitments: Hospitalization of the person of concern is sometimes necessary to protect his safety and that of others. Involuntary commitments can be quite difficult to secure. Each state has its own specifically articulated standard for commitment, but generally a showing must be made that the person of concern shows signs of mental illness and poses an imminent risk of harm to himself or others, or is unable to care for himself.^d Decision makers may be well-advised to avoid the temptation to accept a mentally ill person of concern’s agreement to voluntary commitment when he already meets the standard for involuntary commitment. If the person voluntarily commits himself, there may be nothing to stop him from checking himself out of hospitalization whenever he wants to leave. Further, a record of voluntary commitment may not have the same impact on the person’s ability to legally possess firearms and ammunition.

It is essential for stakeholders to provide collateral information to the mental health provider. A person of concern could exploit the therapeutic alliance mindset by manipulating, malingering, or withholding relevant information. Telling the truth about violent intentions does not align with the goals of a person who does, indeed, truly intend harm. He may fear that truth-telling may cause him to be held longer, which is counterproductive to his goal. Evaluators should not base their decisions solely on the information provided to them by the person of concern, (e.g. “Of course I didn’t mean that – I was just upset.”).

Law enforcement officers are reminded that HIPAA and other privacy laws do not prohibit them from *providing information to* a mental health professional; the mental health professional may not be

^dOne resource for identifying inpatient and outpatient standards for assisted psychiatric treatment, court-ordered assisted treatment, and emergency hospitalization by state may be found at www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org.

able to confirm patient status but may still legally accept this information. It is absolutely critical to ensure that mental health practitioners responsible for conducting intake or other evaluations have 100% of the case information available to them.

Student P was a criminal justice major with a high GPA. A high-risk admission, he had a long criminal history of alcohol and drug offenses, and a history of violence. His grievance was that he believed the faculty and students were sharing information about his criminal history. Student P sent threatening emails which caused a referral to the campus threat assessment team. When he sent a message that he was planning to commit suicide, he was involuntarily committed to the hospital for a mental evaluation. A forensic psychiatrist conducted a thorough evaluation and concluded he suffered from a delusional disorder and that his conduct would not change without treatment with antipsychotic medications. However, Student P had a long history of noncompliance with treatment and a history of self-medicating with alcohol and illegal drugs. Therefore, the treating psychiatrist recommended that he be forcibly medicated with injectable antipsychotic medications. In a similar case involving an “outpatient commitment,” a person of concern was allowed the option of taking injectable antipsychotic medication because he would not comply with pills; he had to go to a local clinic for his injection once a month. While he did not legally have to submit to injections, failure to appear on the set dates would trigger immediate reassessment by the local threat management team and the potential for inpatient commitment.

➤ Substance abuse treatment: Options include inpatient hospitalization or outpatient drug treatment programs, random urine toxicology screens, court-ordered drug screens, and self-help programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous.

Mr. Q posted numerous threats directed to law enforcement and a minority group on social media. He had anti-government views, was paranoid, and had a history of alcohol and substance abuse. He was involuntarily committed for psychiatric evaluation and treatment as a teenager after assaulting his mother. He had attempted suicide at least once. He was also tied to illegal drug distribution, and was a known user of methamphetamine. A mental health professional consulted on the case and opined that Mr. Q’s drug use was linked to his paranoia and threatening behaviors. Additionally, it dramatically reduced his quality of life and created additional stressors for him. Mr. Q was arrested for felony trespass in another jurisdiction during the time a threat assessment was being conducted. The BAU recommended coordination between jurisdictions and mandatory substance abuse treatment as part of any plea agreement or sentence, as a potentially highly effective threat management technique.

➤ Other services: Other needed services may be offered to the person of concern, depending upon his needs and circumstances. These may include counseling or outpatient mental healthcare, stress and anger management classes, alternatives to violence counseling, residential assistance, financial counseling, work training, and any other available options. Aside from the obvious humanitarian concerns, it is in the best interest of an organization or community that persons of concern have access to services and assistance that reduce the likelihood of violence.⁷⁹

Student R was a middle school student who wrote concerning journal entries and drew pictures of violent characters related to depression, anger, and death. His family reported suicidal ideations and past treatment for depression. With a history of being ridiculed and bullied, he drafted a list identifying multiple students he wanted to kill and whom he believed deserved to die. According to Student R, his “other personality” would do the killing. The school initially suspended him and offered him outside counseling options, but ultimately expelled him for two years. The only way he could return earlier than two years would be to receive a psychiatric evaluation and opinion that he did not pose a threat to the school. The student’s home life was unstable and neglectful and his family’s relationships were strained and conflicted, providing an environment with minimal nurturing and ever-increasing isolation. He wanted to see his friends and return to school. However, he did not meet the terms set for re-admittance due to lack of both financial resources for an evaluation and any effort by his family to obtain services. To further complicate matters, the family moved to a different school district, whose staff was not very helpful to the family in navigating the system. The BAU felt the best available management plan for the student would be to place him in a structured learning environment where he could receive needed services, attention and socialization, and be exposed to healthy, positive influences. Additionally, the BAU recommended that his family be referred to a county behavioral health services program which could extend assistance to the family regarding case management, parental resources, and community organizations.

➤ “Outside the box” thinking: Management techniques are only limited by the team’s creativity and the law—any technique drawn from a creative or new perspective must comply with local, state, and federal laws. “Thinking outside the box,” or innovative thinking, can provide the opportunity to resolve grievances or disrupt planning in ways not previously experienced by the person or not considered by the team.

For example, Mr. S wrote a “manifesto” type of document containing very concerning language. Additional information subsequently led to the conclusion that he posed a high level of concern for imminent, targeted violence. Interviews conducted with his roommates, as well as evidence found at his residence, caused stakeholders to seek his immediate confinement. Although no charges were identified at that moment, law enforcement was able to detain him on a mental health hold. However, within 24 hours, the hospital planned to release him based upon his denial of violent intent, in spite of evidence strongly suggesting he should not be released; the treating psychiatrist had not reviewed all of the information provided by law enforcement. Mr. S denied any harmful intent and did not wish to comply with treatment or with boundaries on his behavior. In anticipation of his release, the now substantial multi-agency, multi-disciplinary threat management team scrambled to find additional “outside the box” solutions. Civilian prosecution was not possible at that time. One unique solution was to place Mr. S, who was a military reservist, on active duty orders as a means of enforcing limits and boundaries on his behavior. The team worked closely with his command to implement threat management planning while he was under mandatory compliance with military orders.

In another example, Mr. T was threatening Company 1. No charges could be filed because there was no law which criminalized threatening communications directed to a company as opposed to an individual. Threat managers recommended filing criminal charges as an effective means of managing Mr. T's menacing and threatening behavior. The local police chief recognized a gap in the ability to protect his community and successfully lobbied the state legislature to change the law to criminalize such threats to an institution or company.

Situation

- Address the grievance: Addressing a person's grievance is often overlooked as a management technique for various reasons, including stakeholders' notions of fairness, perceived financial or legal constraints, fatigue, or pride. However, addressing the grievance can alter a person of concern's trajectory toward violence. Many options are available to address the person of concern's grievance. Waiver of fees or debt, deadline extensions, distance learning, severance packages, alternatives to standard business practice, or other options may allow the person to achieve a goal, allow him to feel heard, or preserve his dignity. In the workplace, extension of health insurance, retirement, or other benefits, even when not legally required, may be helpful. In the school setting, allowing a student of concern to transfer to a different class, change fields of study, or to complete his studies online, could reduce tension. Addressing a grievance may not always be easy in the case of persons resistant to compromise, or palatable to stakeholders in the case of toxic or destructive individuals. However, finding a way to do so may reduce the potential for violence.

- Dual phase terminations or expulsions: When termination, expulsion, or other removal must happen, the manner in which it is done should consider the preservation of dignity and respect for the person of concern. A dual phase strategy has been used successfully to accomplish a separation with an emphasis on both safety and dignity. The first part of a dual phase strategy is notification of the separation, which should be delivered in a minimally intrusive, minimally embarrassing manner. The next phase of the process occurs at a secondary location, where a cooling off period is provided, caretaking begins, and assistance or services can be offered. This second phase can be implemented by someone similar to a well-chosen third party monitor, who will be able to establish rapport and empathy with the person of concern. This individual may be a representative of an employee assistance program, a respected mentor, a loved one or even law enforcement—anyone positioned to ensure the person of concern remains stable and feels he has options for the future. During this time, the person of concern can absorb the information provided during notification; this time also allows for observation of his reaction. An exit interview can also be conducted, if feasible, by a well-chosen interviewer. At the conclusion of this part, a successive follow-up strategy is introduced. It may take the form of scheduled or unscheduled periodic check-ins by a suitable third party monitor.

For example, Student U attended a technical college and was overheard by several students and a teacher making statements that he would bring a gun to school and kill people. By the time the case was reviewed by the BAU, the school had already decided to expel him, though it was receptive to guidance about preserving his dignity and preventing any furtherance of the grievance. A dual-phase

expulsion process was suggested, which entailed informing Student U of his expulsion in person as opposed to via telephone, email, or mail. The school initially intended to have many members of the faculty present, but the BAU expressed concern that this might appear to the student that the school was “ganging up” on him. The BAU recommended that a dean meet privately with Student U to inform him of the decision and all appeal options in a clear and concise manner. After notification, a crisis counselor who had previously worked with Student U met with him to help him process the information. This also allowed for an observation period in which any signs that he may be contemplating an act of violence or self-harm could be seen. Following the dual-phase expulsion, the crisis counselor, with Student U’s permission, checked in on him later that night, and then for a logical period of time afterward in order to assist in monitoring for concerning behavior.

Setting

- Increased vigilance/target hardening: When a concern for violence rises above “low,” this option may be advisable. It is particularly important when a team assesses that management options directly related to the person of concern are very limited. Examples of increased vigilance may include increased awareness by personnel in and around the environment in question, training on and adherence to security procedures, identification verifications, information sharing, and law enforcement alerts. In addition to physical preparations, potential targets should remain alert to the possibility of virtual research via their public and private networks. Target hardening can involve a thorough security process review, reduction of access points to the facility, more visible security, parking lot security and escorts, flagging the address in the “911” system, and other measures deemed appropriate.
- Organizational culture considerations: Organizational culture, or environment, is an important factor to consider when planning threat management, and modifications to culture could be recommended as part of a larger strategy. The BAU fully recognizes the potential enormity of such a task; however, organizational cultures which allow bullying, harassing or menacing behavior, and threats do exist. This type of environment is not conducive to a sense of shared responsibility for safety and respect. Healthy organizational cultures which effectively mitigate violence risk via a culture of safety and respect often share the following commonalities:
 - Everyone is treated with fairness and respect
 - The organization communicates effectively
 - Leaders set and enforce appropriate boundaries
 - Members of the organization are held accountable for their behavior
 - The organization fosters a nurturing environment
 - Bullying and threatening are not tolerated
 - Members of the organization are encouraged to report bad behavior without fear of repercussion⁸⁰

Target

➤ Target vulnerability reduction: A target's vulnerability can often be reduced by target hardening; however, other measures could further reduce a target's exposure to violence potential. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Changes to work hours for particular individuals
- Work space relocation
- Social media privacy management
- Varying routes, routines and activities
- Parking lot escorts
- Ceasing communication with the person of concern in some cases
- Personal safety planning

In addition, potential targets should be encouraged to fully cooperate with police and organizational investigations and interventions. Sometimes, targets become frightened, angry, and impatient with the person of concern's bad behavior and do not always act with prudence. Also, targets may become fatigued from constant vigilance and lose interest in being cautious. A strong support system for targets may be necessary to prevent this from occurring; targets may also require implementation of management techniques.

Zero tolerance policies

The words "zero tolerance" sound reassuring in that they imply an absolute refusal to condone bad behavior. However, use of the term "zero tolerance" is not recommended because it can be so easily misunderstood, and research has shown that zero tolerance policies have been found to actually deter reporting of bad conduct; bystanders may fear their reports could lead to immediate and harsh repercussions without due process and possible retaliation against the reporter.⁸¹ When zero tolerance means that the same, severe punishment is applied to similar incidents regardless of history and circumstances, it is detrimental to good threat management. For instance, when a student makes a threat and is automatically expelled, stakeholders immediately lose their optic on the student once he is homebound. In addition, this action may exacerbate the situation by isolating the student, confining him to a potentially negative home environment, and cutting off services available to the student via the school system. A flexible policy, however, permits the school to impose less harsh measures with greater latitude for promoting safety. An organization's ability to address bad behavior should include multiple options, focusing on an individualized response.

Caution against becoming the grievance/last straw

Organizational environment, administrative actions, and interpersonal communications all have the potential to inspire or deter an at-risk individual's decision to engage in planned violence. Threat managers should be mindful at all times about inadvertently creating an additional grievance or becoming a person of concern's "last straw."⁸² A key consideration is to avoid furnishing the psychologically brittle person of concern with the spark that may create, sustain, or fuel a grievance. His

perception of the world typically becomes his reality, and if he feels wronged he may look to project blame onto other individuals or institutions regardless of the true reality of the situation.

For example, one case involved a student of concern who was suspended for menacing behaviors. He planned to return to school at the end of his suspension and did not want his past problems at school to be a focus of attention. School administrators felt a need to search his bag upon entry onto school grounds, which they were planning to do in public. Inasmuch as it was important to the student to remain low-profile, this tactic could have created or inflamed a grievance and led to unnecessary, additional stress. A better approach emphasizing both safety and discretion was ultimately used, in which a school resource officer conducted a bag search off-premises and then observed the student proceed directly to school.

Prior to implementing visible management techniques, threat managers should consider how their decisions, actions, and delivery may impact a person of concern's life, work, relationships and sense of well-being. Threat managers should be mindful of potentially implementing an action that, itself, is a precipitating event which either propels him toward violence or removes the last buffers deterring him. Sometimes people have to be fired or expelled, but those moments do not necessarily have to become the last straw for a person of concern. A person of concern may understand he deserves to be fired and accept it; his last straw event may come when he is fired by email rather than being given the respect of being fired in-person.

Mr. V worked as an armed security guard for a government contractor. Negative behaviors and conflict with his supervisor were raising concerns about him. During working hours, he made references to his personal life, indicating that he was having financial issues, going through the beginnings of a divorce, and loved to get drunk on the weekends. Based on poor performance at work, his supervisor sent him an email informing him that he was suspended, but did not meet with him in person to discuss the situation. The company was then faced with a choice of having to go out and retrieve Mr. V's duty weapon or ask him to return to the work site to turn it in. This was not an optimal way to process a termination, and the situation created an unnecessary safety risk. It also risked creating an additional grievance by denying him the respect and dignity of an in-person meeting.

Thinking about potential "last straws" helps stakeholders and threat managers try to see the situation from the person of concern's perspective and aspire to preserve his dignity.⁸³ For some offenders, perceived loss of dignity was the last straw that propelled them toward violent revenge. Using a sensitive, caretaking approach may reduce the possibility of creating or enhancing a grievance in the eyes of a person of concern.

Mental health is not "the" answer—threat management is the key

The mental health system is no longer able to be the primary response mechanism in dealing with a mentally ill person of concern. It is overrun and lacks the necessary beds to effectively treat all actively psychotic, suicidal, and homicidal individuals. This psychiatric hospital bed crisis is aptly demonstrated by the tragic case of Mr. W. Mr. W was evaluated under an emergency custody order on

a “danger to self or others” finding. Ultimately, he was released to the care of his father because no psychiatric bed was available. At that time, state law provided he could be held in emergency custody for a maximum of six hours while providers searched for a bed. When one was not found, he had to be released. Less than 24 hours later, he stabbed his father multiple times and then committed suicide by shooting himself with a rifle. This incident was the catalyst for changing the commitment law in that state.

The mental health system is simply not in a position to be responsible for long-term threat management. Beds are limited and will continue to be scarce. Mental health professionals are overwhelmed, often having time only to conduct cursory checks for suicidal and homicidal ideation and intent. Providing treatment to improve psychological well-being is their primary function, rather than organizing a long term management plan in place of key stakeholders (e.g. police, schools, or employers). Limits on information sharing make for a cumbersome process to openly discuss symptoms and treatment with others. It would be convenient if an already-in-place, well-established apparatus was positioned to take on this role, but the mental health care system is not that apparatus.

“Tarasoff” Duty

Threat assessment team members should be aware of the *Tarasoff* duties to warn and protect (See Appendix D) in their respective jurisdictions, as this knowledge can become a tool to persuade mental health providers to offer critical feedback during high-risk cases when the person of concern is in treatment. When faced with a situation that may trigger a duty to protect, providers are encouraged to discuss the case with colleagues. These situations are often nuanced and problematic to resolve, and present difficult questions such as whether a client has a violent fantasy versus a plan to harm another person. Mental health professionals should consider directly questioning the person of concern regarding his violent behavior, thoughts, and feelings. When deciding whether to breach confidentiality in order to protect others, they should not rely solely upon the person of concern’s assertions. (See discussion of the distinction of making a threat versus posing a threat, pages 15-16.) Rather, providers are encouraged to consider such factors as the person’s past history of violent and dangerous acts, personality characteristics, cognitive style and functioning, social history, history of criminal acts, current perceived stress, the nature of the social environment, means to accomplish violence, access to a victim, substance abuse, presence of anger, diagnosis, current level of functioning, and prior responses to treatment. It is equally important for the treating professionals to consider the risk presented by precipitating events such as rejection or some type of loss, or other warning behaviors.

Implement and reassess

Threat management is a dynamic process and strategies will often require adjustments to enhance success. Once a strategy is implemented, this begins a period of reassessment, during which the management plan's effectiveness is evaluated and changes can be made. The threat assessment and threat management relationship is one of continuous reassessment and modification. If one management strategy does not create the results a team is looking for, the next steps are to reassess, modify the plan, and try again. (See page 78)

Thoughtful and reasoned management strategies developed with an understanding of threat assessment and management principles usually work well and effectively mitigate violence concern; they will rarely backfire or have no effect, though every team should be prepared for these possibilities. Third party monitors can be very helpful in communicating back to the team or stakeholders about any reactions from the person of concern. This is particularly true when a plan is implemented based upon a *preliminary* assessment when there are significant information gaps present in the case. In many cases, the person's reaction to management techniques may require reassessment and a new strategy.

Long-term solutions are frequently required to successfully manage higher concern cases. Short-term techniques will often suffice to resolve lower concern matters. As time progresses, "low" persons of concern exhibiting recurring behaviors may require additional behavioral management steps. The reassessment phase will assist threat managers in identifying points of escalation. Assessors must always remember that a threat management strategy may not be as effective as initially planned and, if left on autopilot without follow up or adjustment, the person of concern and situation could deteriorate.

Family

In furtherance of efforts to manage a person of concern away from a potentially violent outcome, family members are often a primary point of contact with a threat management team's representative to both understand and manage the person. If the family unit appears to be loving, supportive, and an overall positive force, it should be considered a beneficial threat management component. Families who support interventions and enforce limits are helpful to the cause. Family members can act as third party intermediaries between the person of concern and a team trying to manage him away from violence. They should not participate in threat assessment and management strategy meetings as it would be unfair and inappropriate to subject them to a conflict of interest. However, when it is deemed appropriate and it does not add further risk, teams may wish to provide detailed information to designated family members to help them understand the true concern and nature of the threat posed by their loved one. The team should carefully consider whether its relationship with a selected family member, or any third party monitor, should be made known.

Conversely, if the family unit seems unsupportive, dangerous, or a negative influence on the person of concern, a team should carefully weigh whether or not the risk of attempting a familial third

party strategy is worth the possibly low odds of reward. For example, Student X disclosed to his parents a desire to harm others, specifically students at his high school. His parents brought him to a mental hospital where he was assessed and treated for a period of weeks. The mental health evaluators developed a safety plan for him upon his return home which included the removal of all weapons. Both local law enforcement and the school were made aware of his intention to harm others. Student X was allowed to return to school after being cleared by mental health personnel. However, he was arrested a week later, after he made plans and took steps in furtherance of committing violence at the school. His parents, who were initially upstanders, felt that law enforcement was now picking on their son merely because of the previous notification. Upon learning that law enforcement planned to conduct interviews of family members regarding Student X's plans, his parents assisted Student X in deleting text messages and social media evidence of his planning. Further, his parents withheld information about weapons present in the house. As a result, charges against the parents were contemplated.

Questions to ask when deciding whether to use a family member as part of management might include:

- Can the team accomplish the same management objectives through another third party or another strategy?
- Must the strategy also include education, therapy, or management for the family member(s)?
- Does the family promote isolation, ignore warning behaviors, and/or endorse or indulge grievance formation and violent ideation?
- Does the family have a history of violence, serious mental illness, discouraging mental health treatment, or allowing substance abuse to occur?
- Do motivations held by family members affect their perceptions of the gravity of the situation or the necessity of management?

In addition to having a potentially detrimental effect on good management, an unhealthy family dynamic can have other negative results, including the person of concern turning his direction of interest and grievance towards a loved one or caretaker. In some cases, family can actually accelerate the person of concern toward violence, for example, by supplying weapons, ammunition, or opportunities for shooting practice.

If a strategy using a family member is employed, consideration must be given to long-term goals and the possibility of fatigue. The energy expended by the family or a selected family member could be time-consuming and exhaustive. A family's perception of the person of concern can evolve or degrade over time; they can develop animosity, sympathy, or take a defensive stance regarding the person. They may justify and downplay the person's behaviors. Any one of these responses may supply the person of concern with the freedom and detachment needed to engage in threatening or violent behavior.

Threat management is like good parenting

Good threat management should reflect the same positive characteristics of good parenting. Teams should act with care and thoughtfulness; set limitations and boundaries for the person of concern; and apply appropriate consequences intended to change behavior for the better. A well-functioning threat management team:

- Understands the value of caretaking
- Plans well and understands when urgency is needed
- Cooperates and shares information well amongst members
- Sets rules and boundaries
- Provides guidance and follow-through for persons and entities carrying out the management plan
- Continually re-evaluates active cases and re-engages when necessary
- Understands that patience may be necessary during the entire process

These characteristics are akin to a healthy parenting style. A good parent has the ability to: be a caretaker, plan, cooperate, be patient, set rules and boundaries, provide guidance, follow-through, ensure consequences for rule-breaking, and continually re-evaluate how things are going to ensure the child becomes a successful member of society. The end goals of threat management are to change the person of concern's behavior and pattern of thinking for the better, avoid violence, and stabilize the situation permanently.

Chapter 5 Threat Management Team: The Set Up

The previous chapters of this guide provide information about assessing and managing persons of concern. Threats of violence are ultimately a community issue, often requiring collaboration across many entities within the community. Ideally, the threat management team will establish collaborative relationships early on and maintain ongoing interaction and dialogue with key resources over time. What follows is a description of threat assessment and management team mechanics. Questions about why and how threat management teams work, achieving and maintaining a knowledge base, and getting resource commitment and support from organizations are addressed herein.

Why threat management teams work

The threat management team model is a viable and effective method for assessing violence potential and disrupting planned attacks of targeted violence. No one person is positioned to see every single risk factor, warning behavior, or mitigator, nor is one single individual positioned to manage a threat. When a team member receives a new case for review, he may extract an important detail due to his particular skill set, whereas other team members may not initially recognize its importance. For instance, a mental health professional may recognize signs of mental decompensation, which could simply appear as a change in personal hygiene to another member. A team member may ask a question during the consultative process that prompts others to think in a different way. This in turn could lead to a more accurate assessment and a more creative, and ultimately successful, threat management strategy. Symposium participants believe that consensus, derived from individual assessments of team members acting in concert, is the most powerful method to assess and mitigate future violence concern. Open discussion and professional debates or disagreements are embraced. Diverse perspectives can generate new investigative leads and can prompt additional areas for inquiry, thus allowing for a more complete, holistic and accurate threat assessment and management.

Logistics

A threat assessment and management team is a multidisciplinary body, trained to assess and recommend management strategies for persons of concern and threats of violence. The functions of these teams are to:

- Gather all available information related to reports about a person of concern or threats of violence
- Determine, via threat assessment, whether the person of concern poses a safety threat
- Offer reasoned and thoughtful management recommendations designed to reduce targeted violence concern and promote safety for all, including the person of concern

As communities build threat management teams to address concerns about targeted violence, they must consider multiple logistical requirements. This chapter addresses a host of such considerations, ranging from the recommended composition of a team to retiring a case.

Multidisciplinary

A multidisciplinary make-up is perhaps the single most important feature of an effective threat management team. Highly effective teams facilitate collaboration, coordination, and communication across various parts of organizations or communities to address persons of concern and threats of targeted violence. They will often need to leverage the perspective, expertise, and insight of various disciplines to aid in effectively assessing concerning behaviors and to develop threat management strategies.⁸⁴ Threat management teams should be comprised of a core group of representatives from relevant disciplines, such as law enforcement, security, mental health, social services, legal, human resources or administration, or others relevant to the entity establishing the team. A threat management team with a well-rounded composition of diverse members provides a versatile team of practitioners with different perspectives, capabilities, and backgrounds to address targeted violence concerns.

Many “person of concern” cases will involve individuals demonstrating warning behaviors and exhibiting risk factors, but where no punishable violations or infractions have occurred. Alternatively, they may have occurred but a course of action involving punishment may not be wise at a given point in time. In such cases, good management may require the expertise of community-based mental health services, social services, law enforcement, and other resources to effectively address them. For example, a person of concern may have a grievance about utilities because he cannot afford to pay the bills; social services may have a unique knowledge of special funding programs which can assist. Having a multi- and interdisciplinary team of members from diverse professions in place provides specific options and flexibility to aid in addressing the situation. This approach facilitates collaboration across various parts of a community and/or organizations that is fundamental to effectively assessing and managing a person of concern.⁸⁵

Co-deployment model

When setting up a process for making contact with high risk persons of concern, strong consideration should be given to a co-deployment model which pairs more than one discipline for both proactive and responsive calls. For example, the Los Angeles Police Department’s Threat Management Unit often teams up with the police department’s Mental Evaluation Unit, which co-deploys mental health clinicians with a law enforcement officer to calls. By arming the team with human resources needed to diffuse potentially explosive situations, officers are better equipped to deal with persons in the midst of a mental health crisis and clinicians are in the presence of sworn officers when dealing with the potentially violent. This model can be adapted to other situations. A local threat assessment team deciding that community services should be offered to a person of concern could choose to deploy a police officer along with the social worker to visit the person’s home. A school resource officer conducting an interview of a student who has made threats may be joined by the school psychologist for the encounter. Bringing together the disciplines of law enforcement and mental health can provide an enhanced ability to assess and begin managing a person of concern.

For example, Company 2 terminated Mr. Y after he stalked several female coworkers. Following his termination, he was observed several times following employees and confronting them when they

were leaving the office. He was evaluated and diagnosed with a mental illness. A mental health court determined that he was a danger to himself and others, and determined that he could be released with the stipulation that his psychotropic medication be administered via injection at home. However, Mr. Y's behavior was so concerning that the medical staff assigned to administer his injections was too afraid to go to his home. As a result, he began to decompensate and act out in an alarming way. A potential solution could have been to co-deploy police officers with medical service personnel to ensure their safety.

Team establishment

Convincing stakeholders that “something” needs to be done with persons of concern is often not a challenge. But who should be doing it? Some communities and organizations are big enough that setting up a threat management team is easily conceived and resources are readily available to get it done. This is not true for every community or entity. In rural or other areas without abundant resources to leverage, one suggestion is to partner with the local emergency management apparatus to create a community-wide team. Although emergency management is not established and educated to conduct violence threat assessment, the discipline does have experience with mobilizing multidisciplinary resources in a cooperative manner to achieve long- and short-term objectives. Local emergency managers may be amenable to leveraging their interagency and community resources to assist law enforcement and others' efforts to stand up a team. Lack of immediate resources or infrastructure is a common obstacle, and yet these are overcome by communities every day. Additional resources may be available at the county, state, or federal level, such as established threat assessment teams including those in other jurisdictions, professional associations, publications such as this guide, or grant programs.

Core and ad hoc membership

The core members of a team will triage, assess, and manage all cases that meet the team's threshold for case initiation. They attend all meetings of the threat management team and should conduct outreach to educate their community on the value of the threat assessment and management process. As stated previously, threat management teams should be comprised of a core group of representatives from relevant disciplines, such as law enforcement, security, mental health, social services, legal, human resources or administration, or others relevant to the entity establishing the team.

Ad hoc members are those who will join a team for specific cases in which their fields of expertise are needed rather than all of them. These supplemental members should be identified and called upon as necessary based upon their subject matter expertise, placement within the environment or management structure around the person of concern, or special skills that may be required in specific cases. For example, a case may require a member with sufficient cyber skills to assist on a case involving anonymized online communications.

Some people, depending on their status and connection to the person of concern, are not appropriate for membership on the threat management team. These include, but are not necessarily

limited to, a treating mental health care provider with whom a privileged relationship has ever been established; an immediate supervisor; a student of concern's teacher; a family member, friend, or intimate partner; or clergy with whom the person of concern has a pastoral relationship. For them, participation in threat assessment and management strategy meetings would be unfair, objectivity might be lost, and it would subject them to a conflict of interest.

A recommended core composition of a threat management team can include those identified below. Composition may be different depending on the organization forming the team.

- Law enforcement: This person brings law enforcement agency representation to the table, organizational structure, record keeping abilities, and can speak to investigative recommendations and enforcement options. This representative has access to criminal history and other law enforcement information (although sharing of sensitive law enforcement information is often limited by statute). This member may be best positioned to lead the team, depending on the circumstances.
- Employee assistance/social services: These representatives will be well-positioned to provide information about services and assistance available through an employer or a community for the person of concern. He also has knowledge of the administrative burdens involved with the engagement of many management techniques, unique programs and resources available, and how to assist people in crisis.
- Facility/campus/organizational security: A security department representative is able to provide insight into safety and security measures in place at the setting in question and in relation to some potential targets or persons of concern. This representative has the power to make security related decisions or at least endorse management strategy recommendations to senior security leadership.
- Human Resources: A representative from an organization's human resources department is needed in cases which develop within the employment context. This representative can speak to employer policy, procedure, and organizational culture. This member has the power to act on management strategy recommendations or at least endorse them to executive leadership. In military contexts this might translate to an officer in the person of concern's command structure.
- Legal: An attorney can help a threat management team navigate the many legal issues which can and will arise during the course of any given case. Privacy laws, in particular, can be challenging to correctly understand and navigate. Appropriate choices for legal counsel could include, but are not necessarily limited to, school district attorneys, corporate attorneys, or jurisdictional prosecutors. It is important for the attorney to be able to identify potential legal issues and corresponding remedies. More than one lawyer could be needed for any given case, depending upon the team's needs and experience level.

- **Mental health:** This can include a clinical or forensic psychologist or psychiatrist with experience in treating and assessing the seriously and persistently mentally ill and/or violent individuals. Any mental health professional with significant clinical or forensic experience will be helpful. If such specialty access is limited in the geographical area, a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist, clinical social worker, or other mental health professional would also be beneficial. This member should not have any past or present treatment relationship with the person of concern being assessed by the team, but rather be an objective third party who can assist the team in understanding mental health symptoms and associated behaviors, diagnoses, mental health resources and treatment, and threat management strategies.

- **School administration:** A representative of the school district or particular school is needed in cases which develop within an academic context. This representative can speak to school policy and procedure, the cultural climate of the school, and can assist team members in understanding the mechanics of the person of concern's daily life at the school. This member has the power to act on management strategy recommendations or at least endorse them to the administration.

New referrals

A case leader should be identified in order to have a single point of contact to promote information flow and case management. This individual will ensure all available relevant information for the case is collected, organized, and disseminated to other members of the team. That leader should coordinate additional resources and liaise with entities which can assist with the threat assessment and management.

All new case referrals to the threat management team should be triaged as soon as possible in order to assess an initial level of concern for potential violence. Naturally, cases preliminarily assessed as generating a high level of concern should be prioritized and managed appropriately. Those cases of lower concern may not require a full-blown assessment or meet the threshold for initiating a case. The triage process should also involve identification of needed resources and ad hoc team members, as well as initiate information gathering.

Process

First, consider creating a mission statement or objectives for the program. This will serve to guide all policies and actions in a coherent fashion. As an example, one team devoted entirely to students of concern in a mid-sized US metropolitan area has identified three objectives:⁸⁶

- Identify and assess threats of potentially harmful or lethal behavior and determine the level of concern and action required
- Organize resources and strategies to manage situations involving students that pose threats to other students, staff, and the community
- Maintain a sense of psychological safety among students, teachers, and parents, thus fostering a learning environment that allows for teaching and learning that is free of the distraction caused by fear

Second, establish how the team will operate. Will it, itself, investigate and manage cases or will it perform an advisory role for those agencies on the front line? The method that works best for a team may depend on many factors including resources, legal authorities, strategic priorities, and the preferences of the agencies involved. In smaller localities, it may be necessary for threat management team members to also be those working to resolve the matter. In more populous regions with many agencies, it is more likely the team could function in an advisory capacity and the agency which presents the case to the team will retain all responsibility for managing it.

In addition, each team must identify to what extent it is capable of assessing a case. At minimum, a team should be able to effectively *triage* a case in order to determine if the matter is of low concern or if a full behavioral threat assessment is needed. If a more thorough assessment is required, does the team have the expertise and experience to conduct it or should the case be referred to an outside resource? This determination will depend upon the level of training and experience a team is able to acquire and maintain. This guide should be helpful to teams, both in assessing cases and in assessing its own capabilities.

Third, what will initiate a new case? The answer will depend upon the needs in a particular jurisdiction or organization. Predicating events may include but are not necessarily limited to:

- A threat or inappropriate communication indicative of violence concern
- A report of concerning or threatening behavior
- Issuance of a protective order
- Recognition of warning behaviors

Next, a threat management team must set up its intake process and advertise that process to the community or organization it will serve, in accordance with any applicable policy. One or more individuals should be identified as intake coordinators to whom the information should be reported. More than one intake coordinator is recommended to ensure availability of options for witnesses who have information to convey.

A meeting schedule should be devised which accommodates the operational tempo of the team and the case load. One meeting a month may be too often for some teams and not nearly enough for others. Regardless of what schedule is set, a protocol should be established for initial team review of newly received cases, so that each matter receives attention as soon as it comes in. This helps to ensure that no case will fall “through the cracks” and be forgotten.

Once a case is opened, the core members of the team should determine which, if any, ad hoc members are needed in order to complete a thorough threat assessment and to effectively manage the case. Once the team is identified for a particular case, information gathering should begin to unfold as appropriate for the circumstances. As information is acquired on any given case, the team may realize emergent need for action has evolved (see pages 23-24 “Triage versus 360° Assessment”). The team should have the flexibility to act, or recommend action, as needed prior to completing information gathering or conducting a full assessment if immediate safety concerns arise. Some cases may require

an emergent response more than once. Therefore, the team should have protocols in place for unscheduled meetings, even if only by telephone or video conference.

Similarly, protocols should be established for how a team shares case information, how a team will meet to conduct an assessment, and how its recommendations will be communicated to stakeholders. Open sharing of information among team members is quite important for this process to be effective. As referenced above (Information gathering, pages 43-44) the silo or stovepipe effect is a lack of communication and information sharing between individuals, components, and executive offices within a single organization, and can be problematic. This concept also applies to separate and independent organizations working to solve a single problem but not fully sharing information. When this happens, it can be highly detrimental to good threat assessment and management.⁸⁷ For further details about protocol and policy recommendations, see “Setting up a policy,” later in this chapter.

Recordkeeping

Documentation of each assessment in accordance with individually established organizational guidelines is recommended. Records may be maintained by the overall lead agency of the threat management team or elsewhere as chosen by the team; housing them at a law enforcement agency provides significant protection and allows 24-hour access. All records should be maintained in the same place for consistency and the case leader should document the assessment. All written products should include caveats potentially encompassing the following points:

- Any limitations of the assessment, such as acknowledgment of known information gaps
- Ownership of the document and who is entitled to disseminate it, such as a statement that only participating entities (core members) are entitled to a copy and disseminations must have prior approval
- Whether the document is suitable for inclusion in administrative and/or judicial proceedings, such as a statement congruent with applicable legal guidelines
- A statement that recommendations are based upon information known to the team when the assessment was completed and a change in circumstances could alter the assessment

These caveats are intended to protect the team and its processes. The following caveat has been used by the BAU:

The observations, opinions, and suggestions contained herein represent a product of the knowledge drawn from personal and collective investigative experience, educational background, specialized training, and research conducted by members of the BAU and others, as well as from published academic research and known case facts. This analysis is not a substitute for a thorough, well-planned investigation, and should not be considered all-inclusive.

The analysis is based upon information available at the time this report was prepared and assumes that the information set forth is valid and complete. Should additional information or case materials become available at a later date, certain aspects of this analysis may be subject to modification or change. All

threats should be taken seriously, and all reasonable measures to minimize the risk of violence should be considered.

Concerning threat assessments, it is difficult to predict future behavior with certainty. This threat assessment serves as an investigative and operational tool which may assist in identifying appropriate levels of concern based on research and experience. This assessment is not evidence of violence risk or criminal wrongdoing, and is not suitable for use as the basis for testimony. Rather, the assessment is conducted and memorialized in order to guide the appropriate allocation of law enforcement resources and the prioritization of investigative tasks.

A threat assessment is only valid for the period of time assessed. Environmental changes, medical conditions, neurocognitive impairments, medication (or the lack thereof), alcohol consumption, illegal drugs, personal conflicts, psychological disorders, traumatic events, or other factors can affect the thought process of an individual. These changes can result in violent acts when none were anticipated and complicate the process of attempting to assess the likelihood of violent behavior.

Individual portions of this assessment are not necessarily severable from the whole, and therefore segments of this document should not be referenced or reproduced separate from the remainder without explicit approval from the BAU.

Each time the team meets to discuss a case, there should be documentation of who was present during the consultation or meeting, the date of the meeting and consultation, and how the meeting was conducted (in person, telephonic, or video teleconference). Assessment documentation should at minimum note:

- Sources of information reviewed
- A summary of the issues that were the focus of the team's review, highlighting those issues the team considered to be important
- A level of concern for violence and justification for that conclusion
- Potential for imminence
- Recommendations for future action items including management strategies and further investigative inquiries
- Attempts to make appropriate referrals, such as to a prosecuting attorney or to a psychologist and/or psychiatrist

A team which carefully documents meetings and protects those records will have proof that it considered certain issues, that it valued the safety and privacy of all parties involved, and that it acted reasonably in its efforts in assessing the level of concern and in offering management strategies.

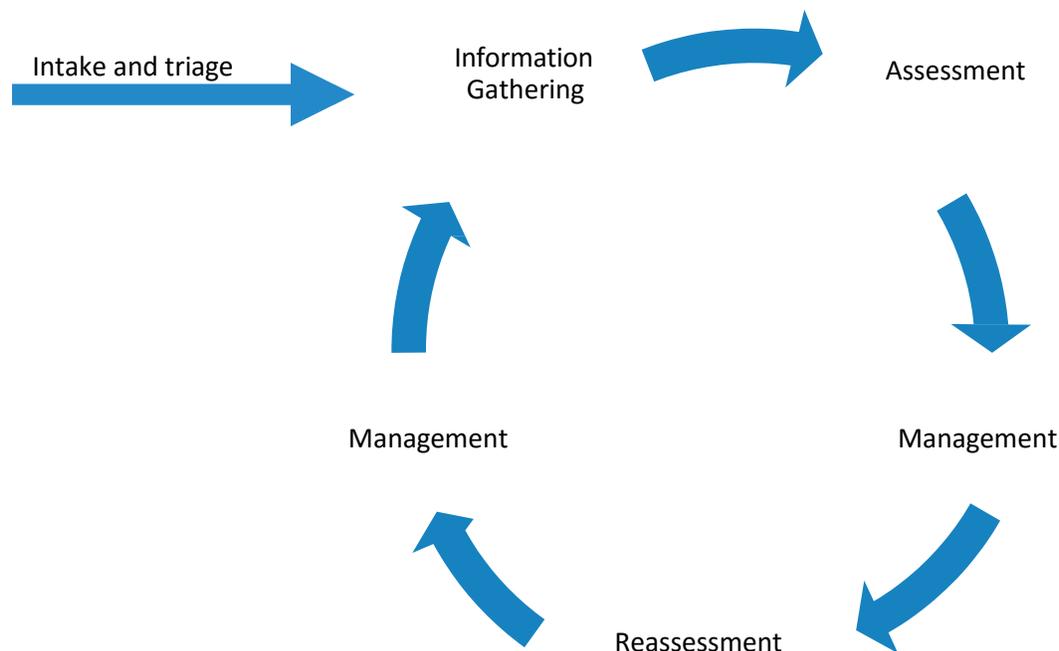
Confidentiality should be built into the process for both the reporting parties and the person of concern. Any case file should be marked and treated as confidential. It should be afforded appropriate

security and stored in a manner that limits access to those parties who have a legitimate need for the information contained in it. These protections avoid giving the person of concern a new grievance, help protect the privacy of individuals involved, and help protect the sources and methods utilized by the team.

Good record keeping over time can afford a team the ability to identify trends and patterns that speak to a larger issue. An analysis of these records in addition to published research can provide data to support recommendations for organizational change or needed programs in a community. Additionally, thorough historical record keeping can be of great value when some cases continually resurface.

Retiring or transferring a case

The decision to “retire” a case is one which the team should make thoughtfully and with careful consideration. *Potentially*, a case assessed to have a moderate or higher level of concern for violence might never be suitable for retirement. It will depend upon the success and estimated permanence of management efforts. Most cases, however, will be suitable for retirement at some point. Normally, the team will want to follow a uniform process, such as the one depicted below, keeping a case active until it no longer presents a concern justifying continued engagement by the team.



If a case is initially assessed to present a low or nonexistent concern for violence based upon analysis of enhancers and mitigators, then immediate retirement may be appropriate without the need for much, if any, management. If a case is initially assessed as presenting a moderate or higher level of

concern, and is then successfully managed to the point where concern drops to low or nonexistent, then it can be retired from active evaluation. The BAU recommends a “holding” period of at least 18 months, to allow for observation before retirement. During this period, the person of concern should remain stable at “low” concern for the entire 18 months or more, before a decision to retire a case can be made with any confidence.

If a person of concern moves out of the immediate area, it may become necessary to transfer the case to the logical threat management team or stakeholders in the new locale. Or, if additional targets or behaviors are discovered outside the immediate area, it may become necessary to collaborate with another team. For example, Mr. Z was identified by Law Enforcement Agency 1 due to inappropriate or concerning behaviors directed towards a government official; he was complaining about a court case and seeking assistance. Mr. Z’s behaviors were assessed and managed over time, preventing escalation and possibly preventing violence. Over time, and for a variety of reasons, he changed his direction of interest away from the official and toward a judge who ruled against him. The case was transferred to Law Enforcement Agency 2, which was responsible for judicial security in that jurisdiction, for continued assessment and management. As Mr. Z’s grievance intensified towards the judge, Law Enforcement Agency 1 continued to coordinate with Law Enforcement Agency 2. The case transfer was accomplished only after a considerable amount of discussion and coordination to make certain that both agencies agreed with the transfer and that continued communication would be in place in case he refocused on the governmental official.

Competing assessments

Teams should avoid conducting or soliciting competing behavioral threat assessments and management plans from more than one expert or threat management team. First, if an entity is attempting to manage a case and receives conflicting advice from multiple sources, it will likely cause confusion and uncertainty. Second, to the extent any conflicts between those assessments exist, it could become problematic in the event of subsequent litigation. Virtually all records may be ultimately discoverable during litigation, and the existence of differing assessments could present unforeseen and unnecessary concerns.

Becoming and staying informed

There are many resources for knowledge and training available within the threat assessment community, in addition to this guide. Currently several established, not-for-profit associations dedicated to the threat assessment discipline are the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP), the Canadian Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (CATAP), the Association of European Threat Assessment Professionals (AETAP) and the Asia Pacific Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (APATAP). Threat management teams may wish to turn to these associations for training and resources.^e

^e These associations can be found at www.atap.worldwide.org, www.catap.org, www.aetap.eu, and www.apatap.org respectively.

Just as in medicine or law, it is advisable to ensure those responding to behavioral referrals are qualified to do so. Although each discipline representative on a threat management team brings a particular expertise and background to the table, threat assessment is a unique discipline grounded in a body of knowledge derived from research and experience. Team members should consider and pursue achievable ways to acquire and maintain knowledge to have a basic level of proficiency. This proficiency should allow team members to appropriately identify, assess, and manage persons of concern. This task is complex, nuanced, and often time-sensitive. Asking a person of concern if he is going to hurt someone is not a threat assessment. Advising a parent that his child has formed a grievance and demonstrated violent ideation is not threat management. Educational credentials in fields such as psychiatry, psychology, or law do not necessarily constitute expertise in threat assessment. In fact, the specialty of threat assessment is typically not taught during the training and education for these three professions. As with any specialty, it is incumbent on the participant to acquire adequate training and supervision until competent in this specialized skill.

One team, one goal

Like any effective program, threat assessment and management require a clear “top down” commitment from within the sponsoring organization or community.⁸⁸ Executive leadership endorsement cannot be passive; leaders must actively and visibly support the threat assessment and management process. This should ensure the organization:

- Designates the process as an organizational priority
- Adopts and endorses enabling policies
- Identifies and allocates sufficient resources
- Appoints appropriate personnel to the team

For ideal effectiveness, each employee, student, parent, or member must “buy in” to both the idea and the process of threat assessment and management. When training is offered, all appropriate personnel should participate. If reporting of concerning behavior is mandated, all should be encouraged to comply. As discussed above on pages 14-15, a culture of shared responsibility, safety, and respect will foster top to bottom support within an organization or community.

Setting up a policy

Organizations may need to consider establishing a violence prevention policy. Although specific guidance on the content of such a policy is beyond the scope of this guide, some general points may be considered for inclusion:⁸⁹

- Definition of unacceptable behavior and identification of consequences
- Reporting of threatening behavior and actual violence via multiple avenues
- Promotion of conduct that supports a culture of safety and respect
- Accountability for unacceptable behavior
- Coordination with other organizational policies⁹⁰

The BAU encourages organizations creating policy or violence prevention programs to consult with legal counsel, administration, and any other appropriate authorities regarding language and policy directives.

Conclusion

This guide results from the tremendous efforts of scholars and practitioners from many different disciplines over several decades of research and experience in threat assessment and management. Although it is not intended to be all-encompassing, it is hoped that this publication will provide a valuable resource for communities and organizations, and for novice and experienced threat managers alike. In addition, there are many sources of information which elaborate on the points summarized herein. Readers are encouraged to seek out the resources identified in the references section.

Understanding the nature of targeted violence is a necessary precursor to effective assessment and management. It is planned and purposeful, and yet could be conceived and carried out over a short period of time depending on the situation and circumstances. A person of concern's movement along a pathway to violence is often observable to others. These observers can become upstanders, who are the force multiplier of threat management. Their participation in the process of promoting public safety is crucial to success. Climates of safety and respect encourage upstander action, and promoting such a climate is a worthy goal for organizations and communities alike.

Threat management is intertwined with threat assessment—they are each part of a single discipline. One without the other may prove only partially effective at reducing or preventing targeted violence. Holistic assessment of the person is the key to a good assessment and therefore effective in devising management strategies. Not every strategy will work as intended, but thoughtful and well-reasoned prevention plans are generally effective in reducing violence. Risk factors, warning behaviors, stressors and precipitating events, and mitigators are all carefully considered. While it can be tempting to assign all blame for targeted violence on serious mental illness, the reality is that mental illness is one of a multitude of threat enhancing factors relevant to violence concern. Threat enhancing and mitigating factors can potentially be identified in nearly every aspect of a person's life. This is why a multidisciplinary and collaborative process is the recommended method.

Engaging a multidisciplinary team is perhaps the single most important thing a community or organization can do to further its prevention efforts. Professionals from various disciplines, working in concert, come together to apply a wide range of experience, expertise, and judgment to a problem that is complicated and often quite nuanced. While one discipline or another may at times take on a leading role in a case, generally speaking a good management plan draws its strength from multiple points of view and sources of expertise. A well-functioning team will recognize this and develop a practiced consultative process.

Additionally, the importance of education and awareness regarding threat assessment and management efforts cannot be overstated. A concern cannot be mitigated unless the threat management team is made aware of the concern. Informing the community that threat management resources exist is just as important as having a team. While setting up a team can seem daunting, it can be done. Cooperation, consultation, assumption of responsibility, and sharing of information are guiding principles for the establishment and functioning of a team.

Much has been proposed in recent years with regard to updates to laws and systems which impact targeted violence. Privacy, mental health, criminal and other laws, as well as rules and regulations, impact this work and potentially should be updated. Updates will require thoughtful and reasoned deliberation and debate, inclusion of many viewpoints, and a balancing of safety and privacy concerns for individuals. In the meantime, this guide may be helpful in outlining first steps or in advancing a program that is already underway. The BAU and the symposium participants recognize that this evolution is, understandably, not going to happen overnight.

New and additional research is needed on measuring the success of threat management strategies, though this may be challenged by the difficulty with measuring success. How can research confirm that one specific management technique was the one that prevented violence, versus other techniques used in the same case? How can research validate at all that a team's threat management plan, rather than the universe of other influences, prevented a person of concern from ever becoming violent? For each offender who demonstrated specific threat enhancers and mitigators before he acted, there likely are others with similar histories who will never act. Research should be pursued by those with access to sufficient information to enable them to evaluate outcomes in response to management techniques. Knowledge derived from research is and will remain a critical part of this discipline.

In conclusion, there is much work to be done in understanding the best ways to prevent targeted violence. Unknowns remain. However, what has been discovered thus far can assist communities and organizations with identifying, assessing, and managing threats of planned violence while promoting public safety.

Appendix A Levels of Concern

This Appendix is intended to serve as a generalized guide for assessing levels of concern. It includes some points to consider about threatening or menacing communications as well as persons of concern. Depending upon the situation, more or less context may exist to inform an assessment (such as an anonymous threat written on a wall versus a fully identified person of concern in a workplace setting), and therefore this appendix can be potentially helpful as a triage tool or a part of a full assessment.

“Communications of concern” sections can be used to assess communications of concern sent from unknown authors, or where little to no information is available about a known author; this would not include private thoughts such as journals, password protected materials, or other material not intended to be delivered to a third party. If more information becomes known during the course of investigation, use may then be made of the “Person of Concern” sections.

The points for consideration which are listed below are not intended to be an exhaustive list. Each case involves many pieces of information and assessors should consider the totality of facts and circumstances. No individual factor listed below should be determinative in arriving at a level of concern. Conversely, it is not necessary for each factor to be present in a case before assessors are able to assign the corresponding level of concern.

Level of Concern: Low

Communication of Concern

- A communication has been received or reported that causes some concern about potential for violence; it may be confusing, unrealistic, or make no allusions to violence at all.
- A clear grievance may not be stated or implied.
- The communication appears to be more venting about an issue than actually warning of future predatory violence.
- The communication may reference, or may itself be an attempt to resolve, an issue peacefully.
- The author may have not offered “bona fides” to establish credibility or viability of the threat.
- The communication may reference information that is inaccurate about the target, suggesting a lack of inside knowledge. Rudimentary research may or may not be evident. Little energy may have been expended in creating or delivering the communication.
- The language of the communication may suggest a lack of overall commitment to follow-through on a threat.
- The threatened action may be unrealistic or improbable (e.g., “I will plant a nuclear bomb at work.”)
- The language may appear designed to *convince* the recipient of its seriousness, rather than *convey* an actual intent (e.g., “This is no joke.”)

- The method of delivery may not be suggestive of a physical approach or high-risk behavior (e.g., an anonymous letter posted through the mail versus a letter hand-delivered to the target's home during waking hours.)

Persons of Concern

- The person has come to the attention of threat assessors, either directly by his actions or by concerns reported from others.
- Even though the individual may have made a threat, through his actions and language it might appear he is seeking a peaceful resolution of an issue.
- If the person seems to have developed a grievance, it may not be to the level where violence appears justified in addressing it.
- Acting out violently may not currently be an acceptable means for him to achieve justice; this may be influenced by moral codes, spiritual/religious beliefs, a fear of legal sanctions, or other reasons.
- There does not appear to be a pressing time imperative to achieve resolution.
- The threat or other behavior may serve as venting.
- The person may have evidenced few to no warning behaviors.
- The person may not have a significant number of risk factors.
- Circumstances may make it nearly impossible for the subject to carry out his threat (e.g., the person of concern is incarcerated, does not have a proxy willing to act violently on his behalf, and the target is outside the institution.)
- Evaluation of the case leads to a conclusion that mitigators far outweigh enhancers.

This level suggests that the concern for future violence is low. Additional data gathering may be desirable and monitoring for any changes in violence risk factors or warning behaviors may be appropriate.

Level of Concern: Moderate

Communication of Concern

- The communication may explain an understandable grievance and may suggest that violence is being considered as an option for redress.
- The communication may suggest the person has gathered inside information about the target, beyond that which is generally or publicly known.
- The communication may reference the person's engagement in warning behaviors.
- The communication may reference the existence of risk factors.
- There may be no sense of urgency in the communication; the person may still be pursuing peaceful alternatives to resolving his grievance. If a deadline is given, it may allow time for the recipient to respond and satisfy the grievance.

- The communication may suggest ambivalence by the author; he may not have completely made up his mind whether violence is an acceptable resolution (e.g., “This will happen either Tuesday or maybe Wednesday.”)
- Threat assessors may not have complete or accurate information that would guide the assessment towards one end of the continuum or the other.

Persons of Concern

- The person may have surpassed some of the low level of concern factors, or there is an absence of significant mitigating factors.
- The person may have a grievance, and is more likely to be considering violence as an option and as a means to achieve justice.
- The person may not have made a decision about whether to act out violently.
- Others may be concerned about the person potentially acting out violently.
- The person may exhibit a cluster of warning behaviors, potentially combining both expression and action.
- The person may be engaged in the research and planning phase of a possible attack (e.g., information gathering and basic research pertaining to a target.)
- The person may have an increased number of risk factors (e.g. acting out violently, a paranoid personality disorder, substance abuse, or instability in employment and relationships). At this point in time, these factors may or may not be appropriately managed by the person or those around him.
- Stressors may be present or forthcoming in the person’s life that could be considered “wild cards;” their activation or exacerbation could move the person further toward violence. Oftentimes these stressors involve financial, employment, status, family, or relationship troubles.
- There may be significant information lacking from the investigation about the person, the potential victim, the context of the threat, or other substantial aspects, which make pinpointing a level of concern difficult. Critical factors which could impact the assessment one way or another are missing.

This level suggests that violence could possibly occur, although the situation is not urgent. Violence cannot be ruled out. Monitoring and additional actions are necessary or desirable to further evaluate and respond to the situation to a point of resolution.

Level of Concern: Elevated

Communication of Concern

- The communication may reflect an increase in intensity and/or severity in the tone and content—particularly in a series of communications, as well as the person’s use of multiple methods of delivery (e.g., in-person, telephone, fax, mail, electronic, etc.).

- The communication may indicate the person has conducted research on the target and has necessary inside, personal, or background information on potential victim(s). It strongly suggests he has the knowledge necessary to approach and attack.
- The communication may invoke special authority for violent action (e.g., divine sanction).
- The communication may be directed and fixated on a cause or a person.
- In a series of communications, in which the person has not acted, the most recent one may notably evidence a dramatic change in tone.
- The communication may reference a time imperative and/or suggest the person is losing patience.

Persons of Concern

- The person of concern may have surpassed all criteria for the low and moderate designations and now appears to have begun preparing for a violent act.
- Such preparations may include: weapons acquisition and training that are both contextually inappropriate and an escalation from his norm; evidence suggestive of time and energy-consuming research, such as surveillance; and/or suspicious probes or approaches to the target location.
- Increasing warning behaviors may become more evident.
- The person of concern may desire recognition and fame and believe that violence can help him achieve this.
- Stressors in the person's life appear to be escalating and his abilities to cope with them appear diminished.
- Suicidal/homicidal ideation is likely to be present.

This elevated level of concern suggests the person of concern is reaching a critical point on a pathway to violence from which he perceives it may be difficult to turn back. A threat management team and additional resources should focus on reducing his susceptibility to violence and the target's vulnerability, through guidance and enhanced security efforts.

Level of Concern: High

Communication of Concern

- The language appears less emotionally-driven and more action-oriented, suggesting that the person is operating in a predatory, as opposed to an emotional, reactive, or impulsive, mode.
- There is a *terminal* theme to the communication, as if the relationship between the communicator and his victim will soon be over.
- It may convey that action may be taken to end the grievance and achieve resolution.
- The communication may convey the person has the means and ability to carry out the threat.
- It conveys the person's willingness to accept all negative consequences resulting from violence, and/or that the person may feel violence is the only available method of achieving justice.

- Highly concerning communications do not generally name the precise time, place, or target in advance.

Persons of Concern

- The person may have virtually or actually rehearsed the attack as a means to ensure he has both the ability and the internal mettle to commit violence.
- The person has finalized his planning and preparation for a viable attack.
- The person may have attempted to breach the target's security through overt or surreptitious approach.
- The person has exhibited highly concerning warning behaviors.
- The person may exhibit a combination of serious mental illness, substance abuse or dependence, a history of violence or family of origin violence exposure, and/or other risk factors.
- The person has the means and ability to carry out a violent attack.
- The person appears willing to accept all negative consequences resulting from his violence.
- Violence appears to be the only avenue of achieving justice currently available.

This level suggests that violence is possible and could occur within the near future following any precipitating events. Immediate and continuing attention is required from threat management resources to ensure violence does not occur.

Indications of Potential Imminence

Imminence refers to a time period potentially including hours to weeks prior to a violent incident. The actual time of an incident cannot be predicted. When indicia of imminence are observed, a law enforcement response is warranted to disrupt behaviors that may be leading to violence.

Communication of Concern

- The communication suggests that all inhibitors to violence may be evaporating; circumstances in the person's life may be rapidly changing so as to force the action; a time or violent action imperative is presented.
- The communication suggests the person perceives his window of opportunity for an attack to be rapidly closing due to any number of circumstances, stressors, or precipitating events.
- The communication itself indicates that a breach or attack has begun or been completed; may contemplate that the author has already died; appears intended to claim credit for an attack, attempt to provide rationale for an attack, or establish a legacy.

Persons of Concern

- Some warning behaviors demonstrated by a person of high concern could be associated with possible imminence, such as energy burst behaviors, last resort behaviors, end of life planning, sudden cessation of medications or other substance use, and sudden withdrawal from life pattern. Examples of each may be:
 - Energy Burst: Preparing equipment, conducting spot checks of a target location, buying needed supplies, and/or repeated posting online.
 - Last Resort: Posting a YouTube video called “The Day of Reckoning,” laying out how a person of concern is being tortured by the government (because he did not receive financial compensation for an imagined slight), cannot continue living with that insult, and offering the government one last chance.
 - End of Life Planning: Creating a will or giving away possessions.
 - Cessation of Medications or Substance Use: Suddenly stopping prescription psychoactive medication where normal pattern is taking the drug.
 - Withdrawal from Life Pattern: Failing to keep normal appointments or commitments and withdrawing to a position of enhanced privacy.
- The person may be attempting to establish a legacy by claiming credit or attempting to provide a rationale for a violent act; communicating that a breach or attack has begun; and/or contemplating his own death during an assault.
- The person has initiated a violent incident plan by beginning his travel/approach to the target.

This level indicates that violence is likely to occur within hours or weeks and all efforts should focus on locating, containing, and neutralizing the threat of violence.

Appendix B Tripwires and Warning Signs

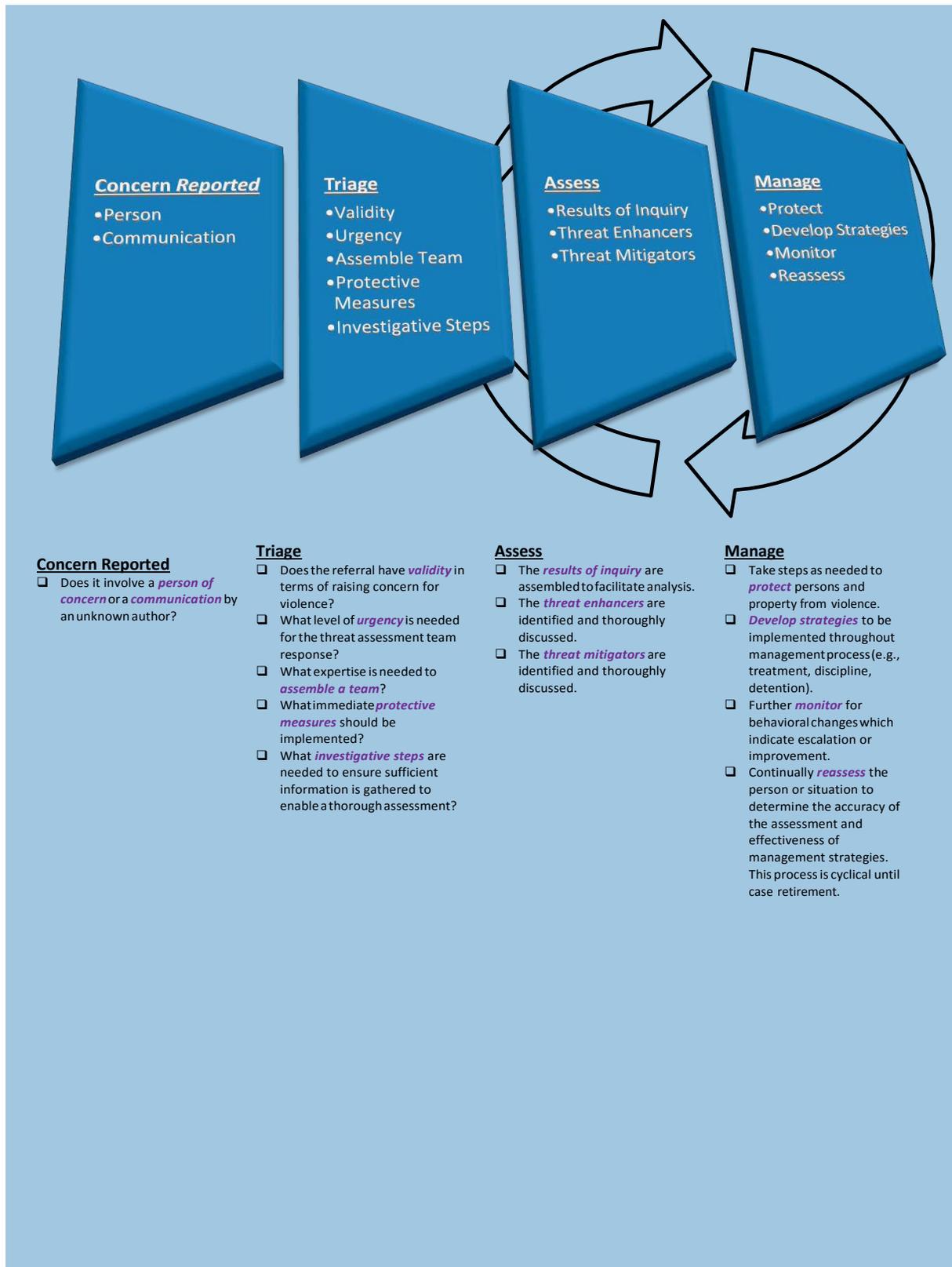
Many offenders who engage in targeted violence may display certain behaviors during pre-attack planning. This appendix summarizes some which may indicate increasing concern. This list is not necessarily exhaustive, and other behaviors of concern may be evident. These behaviors may be observable to persons familiar with the person of concern and assessors should bear these in mind during encounters with him. No one behavior, standing alone, should be considered dispositive of violence concern; rather, all behaviors and circumstances should always be considered in totality. *Some* of these behaviors may include:

- Statements or behaviors which seem to indicate suicidality, end of life planning, or an interest in destructiveness toward the world at large.
- Signs of research, planning, and preparation which are contextually inappropriate in the person of concern's everyday life.
- Recent acquisition of weapons, ammunition, personal protective gear, tactical clothing, or other items, which is a departure from the individual's normal patterns; recent escalation in target practice and weapons training may also be a concern if he previously owned weapons and ammunition.
- Recent interest in explosive devices or acquisition of parts to construct one.
- Contextually inappropriate, intense interest in or fascination with previous shooting incidents or mass assaults. This may include identification with perpetrators of violence, particularly mass violence, and such identifications may be with either fictional or nonfictional persons.
- Drastic changes in appearance such as a shaved head, a large or multiple tattoos, contextually inappropriate law enforcement or military costuming, sudden weight loss or gain, cessation of hygiene, or sudden unkempt appearance.
- Sudden withdrawal from life pattern, such as retreating to temporary quarters, absence from work without explanation, or failing to appear for appointments that are normally kept.
- Sudden cessation of medications or other substance use.
- Sudden onset of reckless sexual, financial, or other behaviors that may suggest a lack of concern for future consequences.
- Preparation of "statement" or farewell writings, to include manifestos, videos, notes, internet blogs, or emails.
- Recent and significant personal loss or humiliation, whether real or simply perceived, such as a death; breakup or divorce; or loss of a job, status, or self-image.
- Recent acts of novel or experimental aggression including trespass, animal cruelty, or vandalism.
- Any effort to physically approach an apparent target or close associates, evidence of items left for the target to find even if they appear benign (such as flowers), evidence of surveillance without approach, or attempts to breach or circumvent security measures.
- Direct or indirect communications or threats using multiple methods of delivery, such as email, facsimile, hand-delivery, text-message, etc., escalating in frequency or intensity, or which

demonstrate that actual surveillance has occurred (e.g., “She looked frustrated when she left the Coffee Shop 1 in her grey coat at 6:23 a.m. today.”).

- Sudden change in social media behavior, including but not necessarily limited to use of encryption, decrease in postings, increase in postings, leakage, or novel use of different platforms.

Appendix C Threat Assessment and Management Process.



Appendix D Tarasoff/Duty to Warn and Duty to Protect

Generally speaking, privacy and privilege end where danger to the public begins. Things said by persons of concern to mental health professionals evaluating or treating them are typically protected by federal and state laws covering doctor/patient privilege, and by practitioners' ethics rules governing confidentiality. One exception to these principles—the duty to warn—arises from an effort to protect potential victims from a patient's violent behavior. This exception is rooted in a pair of California state court decisions from the mid-1970s following the death of Tatiana Tarasoff.⁹¹ A graduate student who was infatuated with her told his therapist, before he murdered her, that he wanted to get a gun and kill her. The therapist had told campus police, but neither the police nor the therapist had warned Tatiana. In *Tarasoff I*, the California Supreme Court established a “duty to warn” rule; that is, mental health practitioners in California have a duty to warn third parties about potential violence if the victim is identifiable and the mental health professional knows or should have known that violence would occur. In *Tarasoff II*, the court created an additional “duty to protect;” that is, a mental health professional in California must use reasonable care to protect the potential victim of client violence when that provider determines that the client will harm an identifiable victim.⁹² In 2004, the California court further expanded the *Tarasoff* duties to situations in which a therapist learns of a threat from a patient or a family member, which leads the therapist to believe that patient poses a risk of grave bodily injury to another person.⁹³

These duties to warn and protect have been expanded to other jurisdictions outside California. There are no blanket federal duties to warn or protect, and states' laws vary in both form and function. Some states codify these duties in their legislative statutes, while in other states the duties arise out of judicial opinions or “common law.” Some states create mandatory duties to warn and protect, while others merely permit a breach of confidentiality in the therapeutic relationship if a threat is present. A minority of states offer neither case law nor statutory guidance on the duties to warn and protect.⁹⁴ Thus, it is critical for threat assessment team members to know the law—or absence of legal guidance—in their respective jurisdictions^f, and to know the standard of care in their respective professions. Threat assessment teams should engage their legal counsel, including, but not limited to, local prosecutors, county attorneys, and state attorneys general, and seek guidance, clarity, and training on these legal issues.

All threat assessment team members should be aware of the *Tarasoff* duties to warn and protect in their respective jurisdictions, as this knowledge can become a tool to persuade mental health providers to provide critical feedback during high-risk cases when the person of concern is in treatment.⁹⁵ When faced with a situation that may trigger a duty to protect, mental health providers are encouraged to discuss the case with their colleagues. These situations are often nuanced and problematic to resolve, and present difficult questions such as whether a client has a violent fantasy

^f A table of state laws can be found on the National Conference of State Legislatures website: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/mental-health-professionals-duty-to-warn.aspx>.

versus a plan to harm another person.⁹⁶ Practitioners should consider directly questioning the person of concern regarding his violent behavior, thoughts, and feelings.⁹⁷ When deciding whether to breach confidentiality in order to protect others, providers should not rely upon the person of concern's words alone. (See discussion of the distinction of making a threat versus posing a threat, on page 15.) Rather, mental health professionals are encouraged to consider such factors as the person's past history of violent and dangerous acts, personality characteristics, cognitive style and functioning, social history, history of criminal acts, current perceived stress, the nature of the social environment, means to accomplish violence, access to a victim, substance abuse, presence of anger, diagnosis, current level of functioning, and prior responses to treatment.⁹⁸ It is equally important for the treating mental health providers to consider the risk presented by precipitating events such as rejection or some type of loss,⁹⁹ and other warning behaviors, discussed in this publication.

Appendix E Glossary of Terms

Behavioral Threat Assessment

Threat assessment is a systematic, fact-based method of investigation and examination that blends the collection and analysis of multiple sources of information with published research and practitioner experience, focusing on an individual's patterns of thinking and behavior to determine whether, and to what extent, a person of concern is moving toward an attack.

Brittle Person

A psychologically brittle person seems unable to process the slights, rejections, teasing, and bullying that everyone experiences at some point in their lives. To a brittle person lacking adequate internal resources to help him appropriately process and cope, even a minor loss can be absolutely devastating.

Confirmation Bias

The tendency to look for evidence or interpret information in a way that confirms a preconceived opinion.

Directly Communicated Threat

An unambiguously stated or written threat to either a target or to law enforcement expressing intent to commit violence.

Duty to Warn/Protect

A legal duty of a mental health professional with knowledge of a potential act of violence by someone in his care, directed at a third party. This knowledge requires him to act reasonably to protect the potential victim from the threat.

Energy Burst

An increase in frequency, duration, or variety of warning behaviors related to a target, even if the behaviors themselves appear relatively innocuous, usually in the days or weeks before an attack.

FERPA

Acronym for Family Education Rights and Privacy Act. This law governs the gathering, maintenance, and accessibility of educational records.

Fixation

An extreme preoccupation with another person, an activity, or an idea. In threat assessment and management cases, it is often observed to involve a grievance, personal cause, or a public figure.

Grievance

A cause of distress or reason for complaint/resentment; in threat assessment and management cases it includes a highly personal significance for the person of concern, often fueling a feeling of being wronged and generating behaviors related to a sense of mission, destiny, loss, or desire for revenge.

HIPAA

Acronym for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. The HIPAA privacy rule governs protections for individuals' health records and other identifiable health information.

Impulsive/Reactive Violence

Impulsive/reactive violence is emotional and impromptu; it can be a defensive behavior in response to a perceived imminent threat.

Howlers

Howlers are individuals who, though they may have engaged in inappropriate, bizarre, or threatening contact with the target, do not currently intend to commit violence. It is often difficult to discern a howler from someone who is planning violence, based on available case facts.

Ideation

Ideas specific to the utility and acceptability of violence as a means to address a person of concern's particular grievance.

Identification Behavior

Actual or virtual behavior demonstrating a psychological desire to be a pseudo-commando, adopt a warrior mentality, identify with military or law enforcement paraphernalia, identify with past attackers, or to associate with advancing a particular cause or belief.

Information Silos

Information or knowledge that is kept separate, is tightly controlled, and not shared. When information about a threat or potentially threatening situation is not shared appropriately it can inhibit attempts to assess or manage it.

Intimacy Effect

The closer the interpersonal relationship between a person of concern and a target, the greater the likelihood is of violence. This intimacy can be based upon the person of concern's perception of the relationship, including delusional perceptions.

Last Resort Behavior

Communications or actions indicating increasing desperation or distress, or that the person of concern perceives no alternatives to violence.

Leakage

Communications, expressions, or memorializations which do not directly threaten but otherwise reveal clues related to a person's feelings, aspirations, intentions, or plans, about committing violence.

Novel Aggression

This is an act of violence which appears unrelated to any "pathway" behavior and which is committed for the first time. A person of concern may be engaging in this behavior in order to test his ability to actually engage in a violent act and it could be thought of as experimental aggression.

Pathway to Violence

One of several models proposed to describe a progression from grievance to attack. Steps along the pathway include a highly personalized grievance, violent ideation, research and planning, specific preparations for violence, breaches of security or other boundaries, and attack. It is possible that an individual's personal pathway may differ or not exist at all.

Predatory/Planned Violence

Predatory/planned violence is premeditated and serves some purpose for those who plan and conduct violent attacks. The offender is not reacting to an imminent threat.

Preparation

Part of the pathway to violence model. After deciding on a course of action and conducting the necessary background work, a would-be offender may then begin to prepare for an actual attack. This step can overlap with research and planning. Behaviors associated with this can include acquiring weapons, assembling equipment, confirming transportation routes, rehearsing attack behaviors and more.

Pseudo-commando Identity

A term that has been used to describe mass murderers who engage in planned attacks and are motivated by revenge fantasies. They are often heavily armed and may costume themselves in commando-style dress.

Research and Planning

Part of the pathway to violence model. This set of behaviors can include any thinking or information-seeking needed to form and refine a plan for engaging in an act of violence. This step can overlap with preparation. Behaviors associated with this step could include internet searches; watching news, social media or entertainment programming; conversing with like-minded others online; and more.

Risk Assessment

A calculation, based upon known variables, of a person's risk for engaging in violence. Risk level is often based upon static factors rather than warning behaviors, and frequently requires in-person evaluations in a clinical setting. This technique is not commonly used by threat assessors.

Target

The general definition of a target is a person, thing, or place that is the focus of an attack. In threat assessment and management casework it is a point of fixation for intended violence. This can include people, buildings, organizations, or more general concepts.

Targeted Violence

An incident of violence where an assailant chooses a particular target prior to a violent attack.

Threat Management

Managing a person of concern's behavior through interventions and strategies designed to disrupt or prevent an act of targeted violence.

Threat Management Strategy

A coordinated plan of direct and/or indirect interventions with a person of concern which, based on current information regarding level of concern posed, is designed to reduce the likelihood of violence concern in a given situation at a particular point in time.

Threat Management Team

A multidisciplinary team which coordinates with stakeholders and other third parties to identify, assess, and manage concerns for targeted violence.

Upstander

An upstander is a bystander who reports what he knows or sees to law enforcement, human resources, school staffers, or a caring adult. An upstander can potentially intervene by various means, but most importantly by simply conveying what he knows, observes, or fears may happen.

Violence Risk Assessment

A specific tool designed to facilitate evaluation of a person of concern's probability of committing an act of violence based on personal and situational variables. These tools are utilized by individuals qualified through training, experience, or education to make risk determinations.

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Appendix G Symposium Agenda

Morven Estates
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia

The Power of Prevention: Threat Management Strategies to Disrupt Targeted Shootings

Sunday, July 26, 2015 – University of Virginia Grounds

Introduction and welcome:

Andre Simons and Kevin Burton

Setting the frame: Robert Fein

Case presentation, strategic interaction: Barry Spodak

Facilitated discussion: Moderator: Robert Fein

Dinner and presentation:

Welcome and introduction: Gregory Saathoff

Opening remarks: Susan Davis

Introduction of FBI Assistant Director: Kevin Burton

Brief dinner remarks: FBI Assistant Director James Yacone

Introduction of speaker: Andre Simons

Speaker: J. Reid Meloy

“Warning Behaviors for Targeted Violence: A Typology for Risk Management”

Monday, July 27, 2015 – Morning Session

Welcome: Gregory Saathoff

Opening remarks: Leonard Johns

Case presentation: Dave Okada and John Van Dreal

Case presentation: Mario Scalora and Jeff Dunn

Facilitated discussions by group

Working lunch

Introduction: Kevin Burton

Speaker: Molly Amman

“Threat Management and Legal Realities”

Monday, July 27, 2015 – Afternoon Session

Video presentation: “The Coming Storm”

Andre Simons and Katherine Schweit

Discussion: “How can our survey results drive discussion?”

Sally Johnson and Andre Simons

Small group discussions

Small group presentations

Monday, July 27, 2015 – Evening Session

Dinner and presentation:

Introduction: Edwin Meese III

Speaker: Ronald Schouten

“The Mental Health System and Threat Management”

Tuesday, July 28, 2015 – Morning Session

Plenary review and strategic plan

Sally Johnson

Small group discussions

Working lunch: *Checking In: Final Calibrations*

Final plenary summation from working groups

Closing comments

Andre Simons and Kevin Burton

Endnotes

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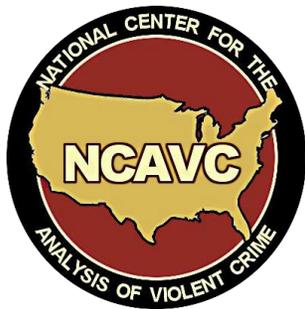
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This product is provided by the Behavioral Analysis Unit for the purpose of assisting the reader’s understanding of general threat assessment and management principles. Exclusive reliance should not be placed upon the content of this publication, as it is not intended to comprise the entire body of knowledge relevant to this discipline. Opinions and recommendations herein are drawn from published research as well as individual and institutional experience and education of the authors, other members of the BAU, and symposium participants. This publication was released in February 2017 and is current as of November 2016; research and experience in this and related fields will continue to advance in the future and will be documented in other sources.

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Behavioral Threat Assessment Center

National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime

Critical Incident Response Group

Federal Bureau of Investigation

GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING HIGH-QUALITY SCHOOL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLANS



FEMA



GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING HIGH-QUALITY SCHOOL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLANS

U.S. Department of Education
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Federal Emergency Management Agency

2013

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June 2013

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Each school day, our nation’s schools are entrusted to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for approximately 55 million elementary and secondary school students¹ in public and nonpublic schools. Families and communities expect schools to keep their children and youths safe from threats (human-caused emergencies such as crime and violence) and hazards (natural disasters, disease outbreaks, and accidents). In collaboration with their local government and community partners, schools can take steps to plan for these potential emergencies through the creation of a school Emergency Operations Plan (school EOP).

Lessons learned from school emergencies highlight the importance of preparing school officials and first responders to implement emergency operations plans. By having plans in place to keep students and staff safe, schools play a key role in taking preventative and protective measures to stop an emergency from occurring or reduce the impact of an incident. Although schools are not traditional response organizations, when a school-based emergency occurs, school personnel respond immediately. They provide first aid, notify response partners, and provide instructions before first responders arrive. They also work with their community partners, i.e., governmental organizations that have a responsibility in the school emergency operations plan to provide a cohesive, coordinated response. Community partners include first responders (law enforcement officers, fire officials, and emergency medical services personnel) as well as public and mental health entities.

We recommend that planning teams responsible for developing and revising school EOPs use this document to guide their efforts. It is recommended that districts and individual schools compare existing plans and processes against the content and processes outlined in this guide. To gain the most from it, users should read through the entire document prior to initiating their planning efforts and then refer back to it throughout the planning process.

The guide is organized in four sections:

1. The principles of school emergency management planning.
2. A process for developing, implementing, and continually refining a school EOP with community partners (e.g., first responders and emergency management personnel) at the school building level.
3. A discussion of the form, function, and content of school EOPs.
4. “A Closer Look,” which considers key topics that support school emergency planning, including addressing an *active shooter*, school climate, psychological first aid, and information-sharing.

As the team that developed this guide began its work to respond to the president’s call for model emergency management plans for schools, it became clear that there is a need to help ensure that

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2011*. Washington, DC: Author, 2012. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/index.asp>.

our schools' emergency planning efforts are aligned with the emergency planning practices at the national, state, and local levels. Recent developments have put a new emphasis on the process for developing EOPs.

National preparedness efforts, including planning, are now informed by *Presidential Policy Directive (PPD) 8*, which was signed by the president in March 2011 and describes the nation's approach to preparedness. This directive represents an evolution in our collective understanding of national preparedness, based on the lessons learned from terrorist attacks, hurricanes, school incidents, and other experiences.

PPD-8 defines preparedness around five mission areas: Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery.

- ❖ **Prevention**,² for the purposes of this guide, means the capabilities necessary to avoid, deter, or stop an imminent crime or threatened or actual mass casualty incident. Prevention is the action schools take to prevent a threatened or actual incident from occurring.
- ❖ **Protection** means the capabilities to secure schools against acts of violence and manmade or natural disasters. Protection focuses on ongoing actions that protect students, teachers, staff, visitors, networks, and property from a threat or hazard.
- ❖ **Mitigation** means the capabilities necessary to eliminate or reduce the loss of life and property damage by lessening the impact of an event or emergency. In this document, "mitigation" also means reducing the likelihood that threats and hazards will happen.
- ❖ **Response** means the capabilities necessary to stabilize an emergency once it has already happened or is certain to happen in an unpreventable way; establish a safe and secure environment; save lives and property; and facilitate the transition to recovery.
- ❖ **Recovery** means the capabilities necessary to assist schools affected by an event or emergency in restoring the learning environment.

Emergency management officials and emergency responders engaging with schools are familiar with this terminology. These mission areas generally align with the three timeframes associated with an incident: before, during, and after.

The majority of Prevention, Protection, and Mitigation activities generally occur before an incident, although these three mission areas do have ongoing activities that can occur throughout an incident. Response activities occur during an incident, and Recovery activities can begin during an incident and occur after an incident. To help avoid confusion over terms and allow for ease of reference, this guide uses "before," "during," and "after."

² In the broader *PPD-8* construct, the term "prevention" refers to those capabilities necessary to avoid, prevent, or stop a threatened or actual act of terrorism. The term "prevention" also refers to preventing imminent threats.

As schools plan for and execute response and recovery activities through the emergency operations plan, they should use the concepts and principles of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). One component of NIMS is the Incident Command System (ICS), which provides a standardized approach for *incident management*, regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity. By using ICS during an incident, schools will be able to more effectively work with the responders in their communities. For more information on ICS and NIMS, please see the Resources section.

While some of the vocabulary, processes, and approaches discussed in this guide may be new to the education community, they are critical. The vocabulary, processes, and approaches are critical to the creation of emergency management practices and plans that are integrated with the efforts of first responders and other key stakeholders, and that incorporate everything possible to keep children safe. If a school system has an existing plan, revising and adapting that plan using the principles and process described in this guide will help ensure alignment with the terminology and approaches used across the nation.

The Departments issuing this guidance are providing examples of good practices and matters to consider for planning and implementation purposes. The guidance does not create any requirements beyond those included in applicable law and regulations, or create any additional rights for any person, entity, or organization. The information presented in this document generally constitutes informal guidance and provides examples that may be helpful. The inclusion of certain references does not imply any endorsement of any documents, products, or approaches. There may be other resources that may be equally helpful.

This guide replaces “*Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities*” (January 2007), which is rescinded.

All websites listed in this guide were last accessed on May 30, 2013.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

The following principles are key to developing a comprehensive school emergency operations plan (school EOP) that addresses a range of threats and hazards:

Planning must be supported by leadership. At the district and school levels, senior-level officials can help the planning process by demonstrating strong support for the planning team.

Planning uses assessment to customize plans to the building level. Effective planning is built around comprehensive, ongoing assessment of the school community. Information gathered through assessment is used to customize plans to the building level, taking into consideration the school's unique circumstances and resources.

Planning considers all threats and hazards. The planning process must take into account a wide range of possible threats and hazards that may impact the school. Comprehensive school emergency management planning considers all threats and hazards throughout the planning process, addressing safety needs before, during, and after an incident.

Planning provides for the access and functional needs of the whole school community. The “whole school community” includes children, individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, those from religiously, racially, and ethnically diverse backgrounds, and people with limited English proficiency.

Planning considers all settings and all times. School EOPs must account for incidents that may occur during and outside the school day as well as on and off campus (e.g., sporting events, field trips).

Creating and revising a model emergency operations plans is done by following a collaborative process. This guide provides a process, plan format, and content guidance that are flexible enough for use by all school emergency planning teams. If a planning team also uses templates, it must first evaluate their usefulness to ensure the tools do not undermine the collaborative initiative and collectively shared plan. There are some jurisdictions that provide templates to schools, and these will reflect state and local mandates, as applicable.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

There are many ways to develop a school EOP. The planning process discussed in this section is flexible and can be adapted to accommodate a school’s unique characteristics and situation.

Effective school emergency management planning and development of a school EOP are not done in isolation. It is critical that schools work with their district staff and community partners—local emergency management staff, first responders, and public and mental health officials—during the planning process, as an effective school EOP is supported at the district level and integrated with district, community, regional, and state plans. This collaboration makes more resources available and helps to ensure the seamless integration of all responders.

Schools can use the process outlined below to develop a plan, do a comprehensive review of their entire plan, or conduct periodic and incremental reviews of the plan’s components. While this guide is designed for schools, districts may use this planning process as well.

Figure 1 depicts the six steps in the planning process.³ At each step, schools should consider the impact of their decisions on ongoing activities such as training and exercises as well as on equipment and resources.

Figure 1: Steps in the Planning Process



Step 1: Form a Collaborative Planning Team

Lessons learned from experience indicate that operational planning is best performed by a team. Case studies reinforce this concept by pointing out that the common thread found in successful operations is that participating organizations have understood and accepted their roles. Close

³ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency. *Developing and Maintaining Emergency Operations Plans: Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101, Version 2.0*. Washington, DC: Author, November 2010. Available at http://www.fema.gov/pdf/about/divisions/npd/CPG_101_V2.pdf.

collaboration between schools and community partners ensures the coordination of efforts and the integration of emergency management plans.

Identify Core Planning Team: The core planning team should include representatives from a wide range of school personnel, including, but not limited to, administrators, educators, school psychologists, nurses, facilities managers, transportation managers, food personnel, and family services representatives. It should also include student and parent representatives, and individuals and organizations that serve and represent the interests of students, staff, and parents with disabilities, and others with access and functional needs, as well as racial minorities and religious organizations, so that specific concerns are included in the early stages of planning. In addition, the core planning team should include community partners such as first responders, local emergency management staff, and others who have roles and responsibilities in school emergency management before, during, and after an incident. This includes local law enforcement officers, emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, school resource officers, fire officials, public and mental health practitioners, and local emergency managers. Their expertise will inform the development, implementation, and refinement of the school EOP.

The planning team should be small enough to permit close collaboration with first responders and other community partners, yet large enough to be representative of the school, its families, and its community. It should also be large enough as to not place an undue burden on any single person.

Connecting the Planning Team to District, Local or Regional, State, Tribal, and Federal Emergency Planning

Schools undertake emergency operations planning within the context of district, local or regional, state, tribal, and federal agency emergency planning. School districts serve as the liaison between the school and these broader agencies. In order to promote coordination between these entities, the planning team is strongly encouraged to include a district representative. The local school district's emergency planning policies, procedures, and training activities will inform and enhance the school's planning to a significant degree.

In addition, from the onset, the planning team should be aware of any local or state requirements that may apply to the school EOP.

Form a Common Framework: A shared approach facilitates mutual understanding, coordination, and execution of the emergency management strategies as well as works from a common command structure. All team members need to take time to learn each other's vocabulary, command structure, and culture in order to facilitate effective planning.

Define and Assign Roles and Responsibilities: Each person involved in the development and refinement of the plan should know her or his roles and responsibilities in the planning process.

Determine a Regular Schedule of Meetings: School emergency management planning is an ongoing effort that is reinforced through regularly scheduled planning meetings. Establishing a

flexible but regular schedule of meeting times will facilitate greater collaboration, coordination, and communication among team members and will help solidify crucial relationships.

Step 1 Outcome

After completing Step 1, the school has formed a planning team with representatives from all necessary stakeholders. The planning team has taken initial steps to form a common framework, define and assign roles and responsibilities in the planning process, and set a schedule of planning meetings.



Step 2: Understand the Situation

In Step 2, the planning team identifies possible threats and hazards, and assesses the risk and vulnerabilities posed by those threats and hazards.

Effective school planning depends on a consistent analysis and comparison of the threats and hazards a particular school faces. This is typically performed through a threat and hazard identification and risk assessment process that collects information about threats and hazards, and assigns values to risk for the purposes of deciding which threats or hazards the plan should prioritize and subsequently address.

Identify Threats and Hazards

The planning team first needs to understand the threats and hazards faced by the school and the surrounding community.

The planning team can draw upon a wealth of existing information to identify the range of threats and hazards that may be faced by the school. First, the planning team members should share their own knowledge of threats and hazards the school and surrounding community have faced in the past or may face in the future. The planning team should then reach out to local, state, and federal agencies for data about historical threats and hazards faced by the surrounding community. Local and county agencies that have a knowledge of threats and hazards include, but are not limited to, emergency management offices, fire and police departments, as well as local organizations and community groups (e.g., local chapter of the American Red Cross, Community Emergency Response Team), utilities, and other businesses that can provide helpful information.

Assess the Risk Posed by the Identified Threats and Hazards

Once an initial set of threats and hazards have been identified through the process described in the previous section, the planning team should select suitable assessment tools to evaluate the risk posed by the identified threats and hazards.⁴ Evaluating risk entails understanding the probability that the specific threat or hazard will occur; the effects it will likely have, including

⁴ For more information on the threat and hazard identification and risk assessment process, please see FEMA's *Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Guide (CPG 201)* at <http://www.fema.gov/plan>.

the severity of the impact; the time the school will have to warn students and staff about the threat or hazard; and how long it may last. The local and county emergency management staff should be able to provide information on some of the risks posed by threats and hazards common to the school and surrounding community. This enables the planning team to focus its assessment efforts on threats and hazards unique to the school community, as well as on the particular vulnerabilities of the building and its occupants.

“Vulnerabilities” refers to the characteristics of the school (e.g., structure, equipment, information technology (IT) or electrical systems, grounds, surrounding area) that could make it more susceptible to the identified threats and hazards. Assessing risk and vulnerability enables the planning team to focus its efforts on prioritized threats and hazards.

There are numerous assessments that the planning team may use, including site assessments, culture and climate assessments, school behavioral threat assessments, and capacity assessments. These assessments will help the planning team not only assess risk but also identify resources and issues that the plan may need to address. Through the assessment process, the planning team may also identify additional threats and hazards.

The most successful assessments are conducted by a broad array of individuals, including support staff and first responders. Students and parents, including students and parents with disabilities, and others with access and functional needs, should be included to the maximum extent appropriate. The assessment also has to be strategic: If the school is in an isolated region of a county and the response times for law enforcement officers or fire officials and EMS practitioners are lengthy, that may alter the calculus of the assessment. If response time is lengthy, other security measures may need to be enacted to compensate for lengthy response times.

Assessments will be used not only to develop the initial plan but also to inform updates and revisions to the plan on an ongoing basis. The following table provides more information about some of the most essential assessments the planning team should undertake.⁵

⁵ For more information on assessments and schools, see the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center’s *A Guide to School Vulnerability Assessments* at <http://rems.ed.gov/display.aspx?page=publications> General.

Table 1: Assessment

Type of Assessment	Description	Purpose and Results
Site Assessment	<p>A site assessment examines the safety, accessibility, and emergency preparedness of the school’s buildings and grounds. This assessment includes, but is not limited to, a review of building access and egress control measures, visibility around the exterior of the building, structural integrity of the building, compliance with applicable architectural standards for individuals with disabilities and others with functional and access needs, and emergency vehicle access.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased understanding of the potential impact of threats and hazards on the school buildings and grounds. • Increased understanding of risk and vulnerabilities of the school buildings and grounds when developing the plan. • Knowledge of which facilities are physically accessible to students, staff, parents, volunteer workers, and emergency response personnel with disabilities and can be used in compliance with the law.
Culture and Climate Assessment	<p>In schools with positive climates, students are more likely to feel connected to adults and their peers. This fosters a nurturing environment where students are more likely to succeed, feel safe, and report threats. A school culture and climate assessment evaluates student and staff connectedness to the school and problem behaviors. For example, this assessment may reveal a high number of bullying incidents, indicating a need to implement an anti-bullying program. If a student survey is used to assess culture and climate, student privacy must be protected. A range of school personnel can assist in the assessment of culture and school climate, including school counselors and mental health staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of students’ and staff’s perceptions of their safety. • Knowledge of problem behaviors that need to be addressed to improve school climate.

Type of Assessment	Description	Purpose and Results
School Threat Assessment	<p>A school threat assessment analyzes communication and behaviors to determine whether or not a student, staff, or other person may pose a threat. These assessments must be based on fact, must comply with applicable privacy, civil rights, and other applicable laws, and are often conducted by multidisciplinary threat assessment teams. While a planning team may include the creation of a threat assessment team in its plan, the assessment team is a separate entity from the planning team and meets on its own regular schedule.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students, staff, or other persons that may pose a threat are identified before a threat develops into an incident and are referred for services, if appropriate.
Capacity Assessment	<p>The planning team needs to know what resources will be at their disposal. A capacity assessment examines the capabilities of students and staff as well as the services and material resources of community partners. This assessment is used to identify people in the building with applicable skills (e.g., first aid certification, search and rescue training, counseling and mental health expertise, ability to assist individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs). Equipment and supplies should also be inventoried. The inventory should include an evaluation of equipment and supplies uniquely for individuals with disabilities, such as evacuation chairs, the availability of sign language interpreters and technology used for effective communication, accessible transportation, and consumable medical supplies and durable medical equipment that may be necessary during a shelter-in-place or evacuation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increased understanding of the resources available. • Information about staff capabilities will help planners assign roles and responsibilities in the plan.

After conducting these assessments, the planning team should consolidate all of the information it has obtained into a format that is usable for comparing the risks posed by the identified threats and hazards. This information will then be used to assess and compare the threats and hazards and their likely consequences. This is referred to as a “risk and vulnerability assessment.” One effective method for organizing information is to create a table with a range of information about each possible threat and hazard, including any new threats or hazards identified through the assessment process. The table should include:

- ❖ Probability or frequency of occurrence (i.e., how often a threat or hazard may occur);
- ❖ Magnitude (i.e., the extent of expected damage);
- ❖ Time available to warn staff, students, and visitors;
- ❖ Duration (i.e., for how long the hazard or threat will be occurring); and
- ❖ Follow-on and cascading effects of threat or hazard.

While some of the information collected will directly feed into this table, other information, for example details on school climate challenges, will have to be organized differently. The most important outcome is that information is clearly presented so that it can be easily used to inform the plan’s development.

Prioritize Threats and Hazards

Next, the planning team should use the information it has organized to compare and prioritize risks posed by threats and hazards. This will allow the team to decide which threats or hazards it will directly address in the plan. The team must consider multiple factors when developing an indicator of risk to the institution. One option is a mathematical approach, which assigns index numbers (e.g., a 1-to-4, 1-to-5, or 1-to-10 scale) for different categories of information used in the ranking scheme. Using this approach, the planning team will categorize threats and hazards as posing a relatively high, medium, or low risk. The following table, “Table 2: Sample Risk Assessment Worksheet” (separate from Table 1, above) provides a sample risk assessment worksheet for comparing and prioritizing threats and hazards.

Table 2: Sample Risk Assessment Worksheet

Hazard	Probability	Magnitude	Warning	Duration	Risk Priority
Fire	4. Highly likely 3. Likely 2. Possible 1. Unlikely	4. Catastrophic 3. Critical 2. Limited 1. Negligible	4. Minimal 3. 6–12 hrs. 2. 12–24 hrs. 1. 24+ hrs.	4. 12+ hrs. 3. 6–12 hrs. 2. 3–6 hrs. 1. < 3 Hours	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
Hazmat spill outside the school	4. Highly likely 3. Likely 2. Possible 1. Unlikely	4. Catastrophic 3. Critical 2. Limited 1. Negligible	4. Minimal 3. 6–12 hrs. 2. 12–4 hrs. 1. 24+ hrs.	4. 12+ hrs. 3. 6–12 hrs. 2. 3–6 hrs. 1. < 3 hrs.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low

Step 2 Outcome

After completing Step 2, the planning team has a prioritized (high, medium, or low risk) list of threats and hazards based on the results of the risk assessment.



Step 3: Determine Goals and Objectives

In Step 3, the planning team decides which of the threats and hazards identified in Step 2 will be addressed in the school EOP. The planning team may decide to address only those threats and hazards that rank “high” in risk priority, or they may decide to also address some of the threats and hazards that rank “medium.” This is a critical decision point in the planning process that is left up to the planning team. It is recommended that the team address more than just the “high” risk priority threats and hazards.

Once the planning team has decided which threats and hazards will be addressed in the school EOP, it develops *goals* and *objectives* for each.

Develop Goals and Objectives

Goals are broad, general statements that indicate the desired outcome in response to the threat or hazard identified by planners in the previous step. They are what personnel and other resources are supposed to achieve. They also help identify when major activities are complete and what defines a successful outcome.

The planning team should develop at least *three goals* for addressing each threat or hazard (though the planning team may want to identify more). Those three goals should indicate the

desired outcome for (1) before, (2) during, and (3) after the threat or hazard. For a fire, for instance, three possible goals include

- ❖ Hazard Goal Example 1 (before): Prevent a fire from occurring on school grounds.
- ❖ Hazard Goal Example 2 (during): Protect all persons from injury and property from damage by the fire.
- ❖ Hazard Goal Example 3 (after): Provide necessary medical attention to those in need.

Objectives are specific, measurable actions that are necessary to achieve the goals. Often, planners will need to identify multiple objectives in support of a single goal.

Using the goal in Example 1 of preventing a fire on or near school grounds, possible objectives include

- ❖ Objective 1.1: Provide fire prevention training to all students and staff who use combustible materials or equipment.
- ❖ Objective 1.2: Store combustible materials in fireproof containers or rooms.

Using the goal in Example 2 of protecting all persons from injury by the fire, possible objectives include

- ❖ Objective 2.1: Evacuate all persons from the building immediately.
- ❖ Objective 2.2: Account for all persons.

Using the goal in Example 3 of providing necessary medical attention to those in need, possible objectives include

- ❖ Objective 3.1: Immediately notify fire department officials and EMS personnel of any fire on schools grounds via 911.
- ❖ Objective 3.2: Immediately begin to provide first aid.

After the team has finished compiling the objectives for the prioritized threats and hazards, it will find that certain critical “*functions*” or activities apply to more than one threat or hazard. Examples of these cross-cutting functions include evacuating, providing medical care, and accounting for all students, staff, and guests.

After identifying these functions, the planning team should develop three goals for each function. As with the goals already identified for threats and hazards, the three goals should indicate the desired outcome for (1) before, (2) during, and (3) after the function has been executed. These commonly occurring functions will be contained in a “*Functional Annex*” within the school EOP. More details on these functions are included in the Plan Content section of this guide, including issues to consider as you develop goals and objectives for these functions.

For an evacuation function, three possible goals are

- ❖ Function Goal Example 1 (before): Ensure all students and staff know their evacuation route.
- ❖ Function Goal Example 2 (during): Evacuate the school immediately.
- ❖ Function Goal Example 3 (after): Confirm that all individuals have left the building.

Once the goals for a function are identified, possible supporting objectives are identified. For the evacuation goals above, objectives could include

- ❖ Objective 1.1 (before): Assess, identify, and communicate the location of rally points to be used during an evacuation.
- ❖ Objective 2.1 (during): Evacuate all students, staff, and guests from the school using assigned routes.
- ❖ Objective 3.1 (after): Safely sweep the building.

Step 3 Outcome

After completing Step 3, the planning team has at least three goals (i.e., before, during, and after) for each threat or hazard and function, as well as objectives for each goal.



Step 4: Plan Development (Identifying Courses of Action)

In Step 4, the planning team develops courses of action for accomplishing each of the objectives identified in Step 3 (for threats, hazards, and functions). Courses of action address the what, who, when, where, why, and how for each threat, hazard, and function. The planning team should examine each course of action to determine whether it is feasible and whether the stakeholders necessary to implement it find it acceptable. For additional issues to consider as you develop courses of action for functions, please see the Plan Content section.

Identify Courses of Action

Courses of action include criteria for determining how and when each response will be implemented under a variety of circumstances. Subsequently, the planning team develops response protocols and procedures to support these efforts.

Possible courses of action are typically developed using the following steps:

1. **Depict the scenario.** Create a potential scenario based on the threats and hazards identified and prioritized in Step 2.

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2. **Determine the amount of time available to respond.** This will vary based on the type of threat or hazard and the particular scenario. For example, in the case of a hurricane, the school might have days or hours to respond before the storm makes landfall, while the school may have to respond in minutes to an *active shooter*.
 3. **Identify decision points.** Decision points indicate the place in time, as threats or hazards unfold, when leaders anticipate making decisions about a course of action. Walking through each scenario in detail will help identify the relevant decision points for each one, such as whether or not to evacuate, shelter in place, or lockdown.
 4. **Develop courses of action.** Planners develop courses of action to achieve their goals and objectives by answering the following questions:
 - What is the action?
 - Who is responsible for the action?
 - When does the action take place?
 - How long does the action take and how much time is actually available?
 - What has to happen before?
 - What happens after?
 - What resources are needed to perform the action?
 - How will this action affect specific populations, such as individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs who may require medication, wayfinding, evacuation assistance, or personal assistance services, or who may experience severe anxiety during traumatic events?

PLANS MUST COMPLY WITH THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Plans must comply with the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, among other prohibitions on disability discrimination, across the spectrum of emergency management services, programs, and activities, including preparation, testing, notification and alerts, evacuation, transportation, sheltering, emergency medical care and services, transitioning back, recovery, and repairing and rebuilding. Plans should include students, staff, and parents with disabilities. Among other things, school emergency plans must address the provision of appropriate auxiliary aids and services to ensure effective communication with individuals with disabilities (e.g., interpreters, captioning, and accessible information technology); ensure individuals with disabilities are not separated from service animals and assistive devices, and can receive disability-related assistance throughout emergencies (e.g., assistance with activities of daily living, administration of medications); and comply with the law's architectural and other requirements. (Information and technical assistance about the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* is available at <http://www.ada.gov>.)

PLANS MUST ADDRESS LANGUAGE ACCESS

Effective communication with individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), including students and parents, is an essential component of emergency planning and response. Plans must comply with applicable legal requirements on language access, including *Title VI* of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* (available at <http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/coord/titlevi.php>) and the *Title VI* regulation of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* (available at <http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/fedagencies.php>).

Select Courses of Action

After developing courses of action, planners compare the costs and benefits of each proposed course of action against the goals and objectives. Based on this comparison, planners select the preferred course or courses of action to move forward in the planning process. Plans often include multiple courses of action for a given scenario to reflect the different ways it could unfold.

After selecting courses of action, the planning team identifies resources necessary to accomplish each course of action without regard to resource availability. Once the planning team identifies all of the requirements, it begins matching available resources to requirements. This step provides planners an opportunity to identify resource gaps or shortfalls that must be taken into account.

Step 4 Outcome

After completing Step 4, the planning team will have identified goals, objectives, and courses of action for before, during, and after threats and hazards, as well as functions.

Goals, objectives, and courses of action for threats and hazards will go into the “Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes” section of the school EOP.

Goals, objectives, and courses of action for functions will be contained in the “Functional Annexes” section of the school EOP.



Step 5: Plan Preparation, Review, and Approval

In Step 5, the planning team develops a draft of the school EOP using the courses of action developed in Step 4. In addition, the team reviews the plan, obtains official approval, and shares the plan with community partners such as first responders, local emergency management officials, staff, and stakeholders.

Format the Plan

An effective school EOP is presented in a way that makes it easy for users to find the information they need and that is compatible with local and state plans. This may include using

plain language and providing pictures and/or visual cues for key action steps. This guide presents a traditional format that can be tailored to meet individual school needs. This format has three major sections: the Basic Plan, Functional Annexes, and Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes.

The *Basic Plan* section of the school EOP provides an overview of the school’s approach to emergency operations. Although the Basic Plan section guides the development of the more operationally oriented annexes, its primary audiences consist of the school, local emergency officials, and the community (as appropriate). The elements listed in this section should meet the needs of these audiences while providing a solid foundation for the development of supporting annexes.

The *Functional Annexes* section details the goals, objectives, and courses of action of functions (e.g., evacuation, communications, recovery) that apply across multiple threats or hazards. Functional annexes set forth how the school manages a function before, during, and after an emergency.

The *Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes* section specifies the goals, objectives, and courses of action that a school will follow to address a particular type of threat or hazard (e.g., hurricane, *active shooter*). Threat- and hazard-specific annexes, like functional annexes, set forth how the school manages a function before, during, and after an emergency.

The following functional format can be used for the Functional Annexes as well as for the Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes sections. Using the format below and the work the planning team did in Step 4, each function, threat, and hazard will have at least three goals, with one or more objectives for each goal and a course of action for each of the objectives.

- ❖ Title (the function, threat, or hazard)
- ❖ Goal(s)
- ❖ Objective(s)
- ❖ Courses of Action (Describe the courses of action you developed in Step 4 in the sequence in which they will occur.)

Figure 2 below outlines the different components of each of these three sections. This guide details the contents of these three sections under Plan Content.⁶

⁶The term *annex* is used throughout this guide to refer to functional, hazard- or threat-specific, or other supplements to the basic plan. Some plans may use the term *appendix* in the same fashion (e.g., hazard-specific appendix).

Figure 2: Traditional EOP Format

School EOP Format

Basic Plan

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Introductory Material | 2.4. Planning Assumptions |
| 1.1. Promulgation Document and Signatures | 3. Concept of Operations |
| 1.2. Approval and Implementation | 4. Organization and Assignment of Responsibilities |
| 1.3. Record and Changes | 5. Direction, Control, and Coordination |
| 1.4. Record of Distribution | 6. Information Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination |
| 1.5. Table of Contents | 7. Training and Exercises |
| 2. Purpose, Scope, Situation Overview, and Assumptions | 8. Administration, Finance, and Logistics |
| 2.1. Purpose | 9. Plan Development and Maintenance |
| 2.2. Scope | 10. Authorities and References |
| 2.3. Situation Overview | |

Functional Annexes

NOTE: This is not a complete list, but it is recommended that all EOPs include at least the following functional annexes:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Communications | 6. Reunification |
| 2. Evacuation | 7. Continuity of Operations (COOP) |
| 3. Shelter-in-Place | 8. Security |
| 4. Lockdown | 9. Recovery |
| 5. Accounting for All Persons | 10. Health and Medical |

Threat- or Hazard-Specific Annexes

NOTE: This is not a complete list. Each school's annexes will vary based on its hazard analysis.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Hurricane or Severe Storm | 5. Mass Casualty Incident |
| 2. Earthquake | 6. <i>Active Shooter</i> |
| 3. Tornado | 7. Pandemic or Disease Outbreak |
| 4. Hazardous Materials Incident | |

Write the Plan

As the planning team works through the draft, the members add necessary tables, charts, and other supporting graphics. The planning team circulates a draft to obtain the comments of stakeholders that have responsibilities for implementing the plan. Successful plans are written according to the following simple rules.

1. Summarize important information with checklists and visual aids, such as maps and flowcharts.
2. Write clearly, using plain language, avoiding jargon, minimizing the use of abbreviations, and using short sentences and the active voice. Qualifiers and vague wording only add to confusion.
3. Use a logical, consistent structure that makes it easy for readers to grasp the rationale for the sequence of the information and to scan for the information they need.

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4. Provide enough detail to convey an easily understood plan that is actionable. For example, classroom teachers may have a one-page document that covers what they will need to know and do during an emergency, or create flip-charts, posters, or signs giving simple directions. Organize the contents in a way that helps users quickly identify solutions and options. Plans should provide guidance for carrying out common courses of action, through the functional and threat- and hazard-specific annexes, while also staying out of the weeds.
 5. Develop accessible tools and documents. Use appropriate auxiliary aids and services necessary for effective communication, such as accessible websites, digital text that can be converted to audio or Braille, text equivalents for images, and captioning of any audio and audio description of any video content.

Review the Plan

Planners should check the written plan for compliance with applicable laws and for its usefulness in practice. Commonly used criteria can help determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the plan. The following measures can help determine if a plan is of high quality:

- ❖ A plan is *adequate* if the plan identifies and addresses critical courses of action effectively; the plan can accomplish the assigned function; and the plan's assumptions are valid and reasonable.
- ❖ A plan is *feasible* if the school can accomplish the assigned function and critical tasks by using available resources within the time contemplated by the plan.
- ❖ A plan is *acceptable* if it meets the requirements driven by a threat or hazard, meets cost and time limitations, and is consistent with the law.
- ❖ A plan is *complete* if it
 - Incorporates all courses of action to be accomplished for all selected threats and hazards and identified functions;
 - Integrates the needs of the whole school community;
 - Provides a complete picture of what should happen, when, and at whose direction;
 - Estimates time for achieving objectives, with safety remaining as the utmost priority;
 - Identifies success criteria and a desired end state; and
 - Conforms with the planning principles outlined in this guide.
- ❖ The plan must *comply* with applicable state and local requirements because these provide a baseline that facilitates both planning and execution.

Additionally, when reviewing the plan, the planning team does not have to provide all of the resources needed to execute a course of action or meet a requirement established during the

planning effort. However, the plan should explain where or how the district and school will obtain the resources to support those requirements.

Approve and Share the Plan

After finalizing the plan, the planning team should present it to the appropriate leadership and obtain official approval of the plan. The team should then share the plan with its community partners who have a responsibility in the plan (e.g., first responders, local emergency management staff) and additional stakeholders that have a role in the plan, including relevant district, local, regional, and/or state agencies with which the plan will be coordinated. The plan should also be shared with other organizations that may use the school building(s).

Schools should be careful to protect the plan from those who are not authorized to have it and should consider how they will secure documents shared electronically. Law enforcement agencies and first responders have a secured, Web-accessible site available to house copies of plans, building schematics, phone contact sheets, and other important details that round out planning. Schools must comply with state and local open records laws in storing and protecting the plan.

The team should maintain a record of the people and organizations that receive a copy of the plan.

Step 5 Outcome

After completing Step 5, the planning team will have a final school EOP.



Step 6: Plan Implementation and Maintenance

Train Stakeholders on the Plan and Their Roles

Everyone involved in the plan needs to know her or his roles and responsibilities before, during, and after an emergency. Key training components include:

Hold a meeting. At least once a year, hold a meeting to educate all parties on the plan. Go through the plan to familiarize these stakeholders with it.

Visit evacuation sites. Show involved parties not only where evacuation sites are located but also where specific areas, such as reunification areas, media areas, and triage areas will be located.

Give involved parties appropriate and relevant literature on the plan, policies, and procedures. It may also be helpful to provide all parties with quick reference guides that remind them of key courses of action.

Post key information throughout the building. It is important that students and staff are familiar with and have easy access to information such as evacuation routes and shelter-in-place procedures and locations. Ensure that information concerning evacuation routes and shelter-in-

place procedures and locations is effectively communicated to students, staff, and parents with disabilities as well as others with access and functional needs, such as by distributing the materials by e-mail in an accessible format.

Familiarize students and staff with the plan and community partners. Bringing community partners (e.g., law enforcement officers, fire officials, and EMS personnel) that have a role into the school to talk about the plan will make students and staff feel more comfortable working with these partners.

Train staff on the skills necessary to fulfill their roles. Staff will be assigned specific roles in the plan and positions supporting the Incident Command System (ICS) that will require special skills, such as first aid, threat assessment, and provision of personal assistance services for students with disabilities, and others with access and functional needs. Also, substitute teachers must be trained on the plan and their roles in the plan.

Exercise the Plan

The more a plan is practiced and stakeholders are trained on the plan, the more effectively they will be able to act before, during, and after an emergency to lessen the impact on life and property. Exercises provide opportunities to practice with community partners (e.g., first responders, local emergency management personnel), as well as to identify gaps and weaknesses in the plan. The exercises below require increasing amounts of planning, time, and resources. Ideally, schools will create an exercise program, building from a tabletop exercise up to a more advanced exercise, like a functional exercise:

- ❖ **Tabletop exercises:** Tabletop exercises are small-group discussions that walk through a scenario and the courses of action a school will need to take before, during, and after an emergency to lessen the impact on the school community. This activity helps assess the plan and resources, and facilitates an understanding of emergency management and planning concepts.
- ❖ **Drills:** During drills, school personnel and community partners (e.g., first responders, local emergency management staff) use the actual school grounds and buildings to practice responding to a scenario.
- ❖ **Functional exercises:** Functional exercises are similar to drills but involve multiple partners; some may be conducted district-wide. Participants react to realistic simulated events (e.g., a bomb threat, or an intruder with a gun in a classroom), and implement the plan and procedures using the ICS.
- ❖ **Full-scale exercises:** These exercises are the most time-consuming activity in the exercise continuum and are multiagency, multijurisdictional efforts in which all resources are deployed. This type of exercise tests collaboration among the agencies and participants, public information systems, communications systems, and equipment. An Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is established by either law enforcement or fire services, and the ICS is activated.

Before making a decision about how many and which types of exercises to implement, a school should consider the costs and benefits of each, as well as any state or local requirements. For

example, while a tabletop exercise may be less costly and less time-consuming to run, a full-scale exercise provides a more realistic context for the simulated response to an emergency situation, thus providing more constructive feedback to improve the plans. If students are involved, the school should also consider the age of the student population when selecting the appropriate exercise. Schools should also consider whether to include parents and should take into account the cultural diversity of their populations when designing exercises and training.

It is up to the planning team to decide how often exercises should be conducted. While frequent exercise is important, it is imperative that exercises are of high quality.

To effectively execute an exercise

- ❖ Include community partners such as first responders (law enforcement officers, EMS practitioners, and fire department personnel) and local emergency management staff;
- ❖ Communicate information in advance to avoid confusion and concern;
- ❖ Exercise under different and non-ideal conditions (e.g., times of day, weather conditions, points in the academic calendar, absence of key personnel, and various school events);
- ❖ Be consistent with common emergency management terminology;
- ❖ Debrief and develop an after-action report that evaluates results, identifies gaps or shortfalls, and documents lessons learned; and
- ❖ Discuss how the school EOP and procedures will be modified, if needed, and specify who has the responsibility for modifying the plan.

For additional information on conducting exercises, please see the *Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program Guide* at https://hseep.dhs.gov/pages/1001_HSEEP10.aspx.

Review, Revise, and Maintain the Plan

This step closes the loop in the planning process. It focuses on adding the information gained from exercising the plan to the research collected in Step 2, starting the planning cycle over again. Remember, planning is a continuous process even after the plan is published. Plans should evolve as the school and planning team learn lessons, obtain new information and insights, and update priorities.

Reviews should be a recurring activity. Planning teams should establish a process for reviewing and revising the plan. Many schools review their plans on an annual basis. In no case should any part of a plan go for more than two years without being reviewed and revised.

Some schools have found it useful to review and revise portions instead of reviewing the entire plan at once. Schools may consider reviewing a portion each month or at natural breaks in the academic calendar. Certain events will also provide new information that will be used to inform the plan. Schools should consider reviewing and updating their plans or sections of their plans after

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- ❖ Actual emergencies;
 - ❖ Changes have been made in policy, personnel, organizational structures, processes, facilities, or equipment;
 - ❖ Formal updates of planning guidance or standards have been finalized;
 - ❖ Formal exercises have taken place;
 - ❖ Changes in the school and surrounding community have occurred;
 - ❖ Threats or hazards change or new ones emerge; or
 - ❖ Ongoing assessments generate new information.

The planning team should ensure that all community partners (e.g., first responders, local emergency management staff) have the most current version of the school EOP.

PLAN CONTENT

Step 5 of the planning process in this guide introduced a format with three sections for schools to follow in developing a school EOP. This section provides greater detail about what each of the three sections should include and some key considerations in developing the content.

The Basic Plan

The Basic Plan section of the school EOP provides an overview of the school’s approach to operations before, during, and after an emergency. This section addresses the overarching activities the school undertakes regardless of the function, threat, or hazard. The content in this section provides a solid foundation for the school’s operations. The information in this section should not duplicate information contained in other parts of the plan. Almost all of the information contained in the basic plan should be able to come from the planning team. If the planning team finds that it has to go outside its members for a significant amount of information, it may be an indication that the planning team membership needs to be expanded.

Introductory Material

Introductory material can enhance accountability with community partners, including first responders, local emergency managers, and public and mental health officials, and make a school EOP easier to use. Typical introductory material includes:

- ❖ **Cover Page.** The cover page includes the title of the plan, a date, and the school(s) covered by the plan.
- ❖ **Promulgation Documentor Signature Page.** This document or page contains a signed statement formally recognizing and adopting the school EOP. It gives both the authority and the responsibility to school officials to perform their tasks before, during, or after an incident, and therefore should be signed by the school administrator or another authorizing official.

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- ❖ **Approval and Implementation Page.** The approval and implementation page introduces the plan, outlines its applicability, and indicates that it supersedes all previous plans. It includes a delegation of authority for specific modifications that can be made to the plan and by whom they can be made without the school administrator’s signature. It also includes a date and should be signed by the authorized school administrator.
 - ❖ **Record of Changes.** Each update or change to the plan should be tracked. The record of changes, usually in table format, contains, at a minimum, a change number, the date of the change, the name of the person who made the change, and a summary of the change.
 - ❖ **Record of Distribution.** The record of distribution, usually in table format, indicates the title and the name of the person receiving the plan, the agency to which the recipient belongs (either the school office or, if from outside the school, the name of the appropriate government agency or private-sector entity), the date of delivery, and the number of copies delivered. Other relevant information could be considered. The record of distribution can be used to prove that individuals and organizations with specified roles have acknowledged their receipt, review, and/or acceptance of the plan. Copies of the plan can be made available to the public and media without sensitive information, in accordance with public records laws.
 - ❖ **Table of Contents.** The table of contents is a logically ordered, clearly identified layout of the major sections and subsections of the plan that will make finding information within the plan easier.

Purpose and Situation Overview

The Purpose and Situation Overview section includes the following components:

- ❖ **Purpose.** The purpose sets the foundation for the rest of the school EOP. The basic plan’s purpose is a general statement of what the school EOP is meant to do. The statement should be supported by a brief synopsis of the basic plan and annexes.
- ❖ **Situation Overview.** The situation section explains why a school EOP is necessary. The situation section covers a general discussion of
 - The threats and hazards that pose a risk to the school and would result in a need to use this plan; and
 - Dependencies on parties outside the school for critical resources.

Concept of Operations

The Concept of Operations section explains in broad terms the school administrator’s intent with regard to an operation.

This section is designed to give an overall picture of how the school will protect the students, staff, and visitors, and should

- ❖ Identify those with authority to activate the plan (e.g., school administrators, department heads);
- ❖ Describe the process by which the school coordinates with all appropriate agencies, boards, or divisions within the jurisdiction;
- ❖ Describe how plans take into account the architectural, programmatic, and communication rights of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs;
- ❖ Identify other response and support agency plans that directly support the implementation of this plan (e.g., city or county EOP, school EOPs from schools co-located on the campus);
- ❖ Explain that the primary purpose of actions taken before an emergency is to prevent, protect from, and mitigate the impact on life or property;
- ❖ Explain that the primary purpose of actions taken during an emergency is to respond to the emergency and minimize its impact on life or property; and
- ❖ Explain that the primary purpose of actions taken after an emergency is to recover from its impact on life or property.

Organization and Assignment of Responsibilities

This section provides an overview of the broad roles and responsibilities of school staff, families, guardians, and community partners (e.g., first responders, local emergency managers, public and mental health personnel), and of organizational functions *during* all emergencies. It

- ❖ Describes the broad roles and responsibilities of individuals that apply *during*⁷ all emergencies.
 - Individuals that the planning team may wish to include in this section of the plan are principals and other school administrative leaders, teachers, support personnel (e.g., instructional aides, counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses, maintenance staff, school resource officers [SROs], cafeteria workers, bus drivers), and parents and guardians.
 - The planning team may also wish to include community-based organizations represented in the EOP.

⁷ If the planning team considers the information critical to the successful implementation of the plan, it may identify roles and responsibilities of one or more of these individuals before and after an emergency in addition to during an emergency.

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- The following is an example of the type of information that would be included in the plan to describe the broad roles and responsibilities of teachers during all emergencies.
 - Teachers will be responsible for the supervision of students and shall remain with students until directed otherwise. Teachers' responsibilities include:
 - ✓ directing students to inside or outside assembly areas according to instructions provided by the Incident Commander or designee;
 - ✓ accounting for students when class relocates to an outside or inside assembly area or evacuates to another location;
 - ✓ reporting missing students to the Incident Commander or designee;
 - ✓ obtaining first-aid services for injured students; and if trained and certified in first aid, rendering first aid, if necessary.
 - ❖ Describes informal and formal agreements in place for the quick activation and sharing of resources during an emergency (e.g., evacuation locations to a nearby business' parking lot). Agreements may be between the school and response groups (e.g., fire department, police department), neighboring schools, organizations, and businesses.

Direction, Control, and Coordination

This section describes the framework for all direction, control, and coordination activities. It should explain

- ❖ The ICS structure as used by the school;
- ❖ The relationship between the school EOP and the district, or the broader community's emergency management system; and
- ❖ Who has control of the equipment, resources, and supplies needed to support the school EOP.

Information Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination

This section addresses the role of information in the successful implementation of the activities that occur before, during, and after an emergency.

- ❖ Identify the type of information that will be helpful in the successful implementation of the activities that occur before, during, and after an emergency, such as
 - Before and during: weather reports, law enforcement alerts, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration radio alerts, crime reports.
 - After: mental health agencies' websites and hotlines, and emergency management and relief agencies websites and hotlines assisting in all aspects of recovery.

-
- ❖ For each of the identified types of information, provide answers to the following questions:
 - What is the source of the information?
 - Who analyzes and uses the information?
 - How is the information collected and shared?
 - What is the format for providing the information to those who will use it?
 - When should the information be collected and shared?

Training and Exercises

This section describes the critical training and exercise activities the school will use in support of the plan. This includes the core training objectives and frequency to ensure that staff, students, faculty, parents, and community representatives understand roles, responsibilities, and expectations. This section also establishes the expected frequency of exercises to be conducted by the school. Content may be influenced based on similar requirements at the district and/or local jurisdiction level(s). Exercises may range from basic fire and shelter-in-place drills to full-scale communitywide drills that realistically portray a crisis and show the role the school plays in school district and municipal planning.

Administration, Finance, and Logistics

This section covers general support requirements and the availability of services and support for all types of emergencies, as well as general policies for managing resources. It should identify and reference policies and procedures that exist outside the plan. This section should

- ❖ Identify administrative controls (e.g., budget and acquisition policies and procedures) and requirements that will be used to provide resource and expenditure accountability;
- ❖ Briefly describe how the school will maintain accurate logs of key activities;
- ❖ Briefly describe how vital records (e.g., student records) will be preserved (details may be contained in a Continuity of Operations [COOP] functional annex); and
- ❖ Identify general policies for keeping financial records, tracking resource needs, tracking the source and use of resources, acquiring ownership of resources, and compensating the owners of private property used by the school.

Plan Development and Maintenance

This section discusses the overall approach to planning and the assignment of plan development and maintenance responsibilities. This section

- ❖ Describes the planning process, participants in that process, and how development and revision of different sections of the school EOP (basic plan and annexes) are coordinated before an emergency;

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- ❖ Assigns responsibility for the overall planning and coordination to a specific position or person; and
 - ❖ Provides for a regular cycle of training, evaluating, reviewing, and updating of the school EOP.

Authorities and References

This section provides the legal basis for emergency operations and activities, and includes

- ❖ Lists of laws, statutes, ordinances, executive orders, regulations, and formal agreements relevant to emergencies; and
- ❖ Provisions for the succession of decision-making authority and operational control to ensure that critical emergency functions can be performed in the absence of the school administrator.

Functional Annexes Content

Functional annexes focus on critical operational functions and the courses of action developed to carry them out. This section of the guide describes functional annexes that schools should address in developing a comprehensive, high-quality school EOP. As the planning team assesses the school's needs, it may need to prepare additional or different annexes. Also included in this section are issues the planning team should consider as it develops goals, objectives, and courses of action for these functions. While these are some of the most important issues, they are not meant to constitute an exhaustive list.

While these functions should be described separately, it is important to remember that many functions will occur consecutively. For example, a shelter-in-place during an emergency may be implemented but, if the building is damaged, the school may then initiate an evacuation.

Often, multiple functions will also be performed concurrently. For example, during an evacuation, once students are safely out of the building, the accounting for students, staff, and guests function will begin. The evacuation function, however, will still be in effect as staff or first responders work to locate and evacuate any persons not accounted for.

While functions build upon one another and overlap, it is not necessary to repeat a course of action in one functional annex if it appears in a second functional annex. For example, though an evacuation may lead to reunification, it is not necessary to list a course of action for reunification within the Evacuation Annex.

Evacuation Annex

This annex focuses on the courses of action that schools will execute to evacuate school buildings and grounds.

The planning team should consider the following when developing their goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- ❖ How to safely move students and visitors to designated assembly areas from classrooms, outside areas, cafeterias, and other school locations.

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- ❖ How to evacuate when the primary evacuation route is unusable.
 - ❖ How to evacuate students who are not with a teacher or staff member.
 - ❖ How to evacuate individuals with disabilities (along with service animals and assistive devices, e.g., wheelchairs) and others with access and functional needs, including language, transportation, and medical needs.

Lockdown Annex

This annex focuses on the courses of action schools will execute to secure school buildings and grounds during incidents that pose an immediate threat of violence in or around the school. The primary objective of a lockdown is to quickly ensure all school staff, students, and visitors are secured in the rooms away from immediate danger.

The planning team should consider the following when developing its goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- ❖ How to lock all exterior doors, and when it may or may not be safe to do so.
- ❖ How particular classroom and building characteristics (i.e., windows, doors) impact possible lockdown courses of action.
- ❖ What to do when a threat materializes inside the school.
- ❖ When to use the different variations of a lockdown (e.g., when outside activities are curtailed, doors are locked, and visitors are closely monitored, but all other school activities continue as normal).

Shelter-in-Place Annex

A Shelter-in-Place annex focuses on courses of action when students and staff are required to remain indoors, perhaps for an extended period of time, because it is safer inside the building or a room than outside. Depending on the threat or hazard, students and staff may be required to move to rooms that can be sealed (such as in the event of a chemical or biological hazard) or without windows, or to a weather shelter (such as in the event of a tornado).

The planning team should consider the following when developing its goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- ❖ What supplies will be needed to seal the room and to provide for the needs of students and staff (e.g., water).
- ❖ How a shelter-in-place can affect individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, such as students who require the regular administration of medication, durable medical equipment, and personal assistant services.
- ❖ How to move students when the primary route is unusable.
- ❖ How to locate and move students who are not with a teacher or staff member.

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- ❖ Consider the need for and integration of “safe rooms” for protection against extreme wind hazards (such as a tornado or hurricane) in order to provide immediate life-safety protection when evacuation is not an option.

Accounting for All Persons Annex

This annex focuses on developing courses of action for accounting for the whereabouts and well-being of students, staff, and visitors, and identifying those who may be missing.

The planning team should consider the following when developing its goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- ❖ How staff will determine who is in attendance at the assembly area.
- ❖ What to do when a student, staff member, or guest cannot be located.
- ❖ How staff will report to the assembly supervisor.
- ❖ How and when students will be dismissed or released.

Communications and Warning Annex

The Communications and Warning annex includes communication and coordination during emergencies and disasters (both internal communication and communication with external stakeholders), as well as the communication of emergency protocols before an emergency and communication after an emergency.

The planning team should consider the following when developing its goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- ❖ How the school’s communications system integrates into the local disaster and response law enforcement communication networks (e.g., fire department and law enforcement staff).
- ❖ How to ensure relevant staff members can operate communications equipment.
- ❖ How the school will communicate with students, families, and the broader community before, during, and after an emergency.
- ❖ How to account for technology barriers faced by students, staff, parents, and guardians.
- ❖ How to effectively address language access barriers faced by students, staff, parents, and guardians.
- ❖ How the school will handle the media (e.g., district or school Public Information Officer [PIO]).
- ❖ How impacts on students will be communicated to the community, including the impact on activities related to the school but not necessarily at the school or during regular school hours (i.e., church use of school property and athletic events).

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- ❖ How the school will ensure effective communication with individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs (e.g., coordinating with first responders and local emergency managers to provide sign language interpreters for use during press conferences, publishing only accessible documents, ensuring information on websites is accessible).

Family Reunification Annex

The Family Reunification annex details how students will be reunited with their families or guardians.

The planning team should consider the following when developing its goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- ❖ How to inform families and guardians about the reunification process in advance, and how to clearly describe their roles and responsibilities in reunification.
- ❖ How to verify that an adult is authorized to take custody of a student.
- ❖ How to facilitate communication between the parent check-in and the student assembly and reunion areas.
- ❖ How to ensure students do not leave on their own.
- ❖ How to protect the privacy of students and parents from the media.
- ❖ How to reduce confusion during the reunification process.
- ❖ How frequently families will be updated.
- ❖ How to account for technology barriers faced by students, staff, parents, and guardians.
- ❖ How to effectively address language access barriers faced by students, staff, parents, and guardians.

Telling Family Members That Their Loved One Is Missing, Injured, or Killed

When reunification is not possible because a child is missing, injured, or killed, how and when this information is provided to families is critical. Before an emergency, the planning team must determine how, when, and by whom loved ones will be informed if their loved one is missing or has been injured or killed. Law enforcement typically takes the lead on death notifications, but all parties must understand their roles and responsibilities. This will ensure that parents and loved ones receive accurate and timely information in a compassionate manner.

While law enforcement and medical examiner procedures must be followed, families should receive accurate information as soon as possible. Having trained personnel on hand or immediately available to talk to loved ones about death and injury can ensure the notification is provided to family members with clarity and compassion. Counselors should be on hand to immediately assist family members.

The school EOP should include pre-identified points of contact (e.g., counselors, police officers) to work with and support family members. These points of contact should be connected to families as early in the process as possible, including while children are still missing but also before any victims have been positively identified. After an incident, it is critical to confirm that each family is getting the support it needs, including over the long-term.

The school EOP should consider printed and age-appropriate resources to help families recognize and seek help in regard to a variety of reactions that they or their loved ones can experience during and after an emergency. Often, a family that has lost a child may have other children or another child in the school. It is critical that these families and loved ones are supported as they both grieve their loss and support their surviving child(ren).

The school EOP also should explicitly address how impacted families and children will be supported if they prefer not to engage with the media. This includes strategies for keeping the media separate from families and students while the emergency is ongoing and support for families that may experience unwanted media attention at their homes.

Continuity of Operations (COOP) Annex

This annex describes how a school and district will help ensure that essential functions continue during an emergency and its immediate aftermath. Essential functions include business services (payroll and purchasing), communication (internal and external), computer and systems support, facilities maintenance, safety and security, and continuity of teaching and learning.

The planning team should consider the following when developing its goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- ❖ How the COOP annex will be designed so that it can be activated at any time and sustained for up to 30 days.

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- ❖ How the COOP annex will set priorities for re-establishing essential functions, such as restoration of school operations, and maintaining the safety and well-being of students and the learning environment.
 - ❖ How the COOP annex will ensure students receive applicable related services in the event of a prolonged closure.

Recovery Annex

This annex describes how schools will recover from an emergency. The four most fundamental kinds of recovery are academic recovery, physical recovery, fiscal recovery, and psychological and emotional recovery.

The planning team should consider the following when developing its goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- ❖ Academic recovery
 - When the school should be closed and reopened, and who has the authority to do so.
 - What temporary space(s) the school may use if school buildings cannot be immediately reopened.
 - How to provide alternate educational programming in the event that students cannot physically reconvene.
- ❖ Physical recovery
 - How to document school assets, including physically accessible facilities, in case of damage.
 - Which personnel have expert knowledge of the schools' assets, and how and where they will access records to verify current assets after disaster strikes.
 - How the school will work with utility and insurance companies before an emergency to support a quicker recovery.
- ❖ Fiscal recovery
 - How district leadership will be included (e.g., superintendent, chief business officer, personnel director, and risk manager).
 - How staff will receive timely and factual information regarding returning to work.
 - What sources the school may access for emergency relief funding.
- ❖ Psychological and emotional recovery
 - Who will serve as the team leader.

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- Where counseling and psychological first aid will be provided.
 - How teachers will create a calm and supportive environment for the students, share basic information about the incident, provide psychological first aid (if trained), and identify students and staff who may need immediate crisis counseling.
 - Who will provide trained counselors.
 - How to address the immediate, short-, and long-term counseling needs of students, staff, and families.
 - How to handle commemorations, memorial activities, or permanent markers and/or memorial structures (if any will be allowed). This includes concerns such as when a commemoration site will be closed, what will be done with notes and tributes, and how students will be informed in advance.
 - How memorial activities will strike a balance among honoring the loss, resuming school and class routines and schedules, and maintaining hope for the future.
 - How the Public Health, Medical and Mental Health annex will inform the actions and plans of the Recovery annex.

Public Health, Medical, and Mental Health Annex

This annex describes the courses of action that the school will implement to address emergency medical (e.g., first aid), public health, and mental health counseling issues. Schools should coordinate these efforts with the appropriate emergency medical services, public health, mental health, law enforcement, fire department, and emergency management representatives. Mental health needs after an emergency will be addressed in the Recovery annex.

The planning team should consider the following when developing its goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- ❖ What the role of staff members is in providing first aid during an emergency.
- ❖ Where emergency medical supplies (e.g., first aid kits, AEDs) will be located and who is responsible for purchasing and maintaining those materials.
- ❖ Which staff have relevant training or experience, such as in first aid or CPR.
- ❖ How the school will secure a sufficient number of counselors in the event of an emergency.
- ❖ How the school will promptly share and report information about outbreaks or epidemics or other unusual medical situations to the local health department.
- ❖ How the school will support the needs of students identified by the threat assessment team.

Security Annex

This annex focuses on the courses of action that schools will implement on a routine, ongoing basis to secure the school from criminal threats originating from both inside and outside the school. This includes efforts done in conjunction with law enforcement personnel.

The planning team should consider the following when developing its goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- ❖ How agreements with law enforcement agencies address the daily role of law enforcement officers in and around school.
- ❖ How to make sure the building is physically secure (including implementation of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design [CPTED]).

CPTED Principles

Natural surveillance – arranging physical features to maximize visibility

Natural access control – guiding people with signage, well-marked entrances and exits, and landscaping while limiting access to certain areas by using real or symbolic barriers

Territoriality reinforcement – clearly delineating space, expressing pride and ownership, and creating a welcoming environment

Management and maintenance – ensuring building services function properly and safely, and the exterior is properly maintained and organized with landscaping and plantings maintained and trimmed

The American Clearinghouse on Educational Facilities, available at <http://www.acefacilities.org>, provides additional information describing how CPTED can be applied in the school environment.

- ❖ How to get students to and from school safely (including traffic control and pedestrian safety).
- ❖ How to keep prohibited items out of school.
- ❖ How to respond to threats identified by the behavioral threat assessment team.
- ❖ How information will be shared with law enforcement officers or other responders (keeping in mind any requirements or limitations of applicable privacy laws, including the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 [FERPA]*, the *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 [HIPAA]*, and civil rights and other laws. More information on *FERPA* and *HIPAA* can be found in “A Closer Look, Information Sharing”.)

Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes

The Threat- and Hazard-specific annexes describe the courses of action unique to particular threats and hazards. Courses of action already outlined in a Functional annex need not be

repeated in a Hazard-Specific annex. Schools will develop these based on the prioritized list of hazards determined in the assessment process. As planning teams develop courses of action for threats and hazards, they should consider the federal, state, and local regulations or mandates that often apply to specific hazards.

If there is a Functional annex that applies to one of the threat or hazard annexes, the latter will include it by reference. For example, if a “during” course of action for a fire hazard involves evacuation, and there is an evacuation annex, the Fire annex would indicate “see Evacuation annex” in the “during” course of action section rather than repeat the evacuation courses of action in the Fire annex.

Table 3: Threat and Hazard Types and Examples

Threat and Hazard Type	Examples
Natural Hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earthquakes • Tornadoes • Lightning • Severe wind • Hurricanes • Floods • Wildfires • Extreme temperatures • Landslides or mudslides • Tsunamis • Volcanic eruptions • Winter precipitation
Technological Hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explosions or accidental release of toxins from industrial plants • Accidental release of hazardous materials from within the school, such as gas leaks or laboratory spills • Hazardous materials releases from major highways or railroads • Radiological releases from nuclear power stations • Dam failure • Power failure • Water failure
Biological Hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infectious diseases, such as pandemic influenza, extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis, <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>, and meningitis • Contaminated food outbreaks, including <i>Salmonella</i>, botulism, and <i>E. coli</i> • Toxic materials present in school laboratories
Adversarial, Incidental, and Human-caused Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire • <i>Active shooters</i> • Criminal threats or actions • Gang violence • Bomb threats • Domestic violence and abuse • Cyber attacks • Suicide

A CLOSER LOOK

This section of the guide provides users with information on four key topics to enhance the implementation of their Emergency Operations Plans (EOP). These topics are described in the following chapters:

- ❖ “Information Sharing” provides an overview of the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act*, the *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act*, and the implications that these federal statutes may have for information-sharing in the emergency planning process.
- ❖ “Psychological First Aid for Schools” (PFA-S) describes this type of aid and how schools can use it to help students, staff, and families during and immediately after a traumatic incident.
- ❖ “School Climate and Emergencies” describes how a positive school climate provides students with ready access to emotional and behavioral supports that can affect the capacity of students and staff to prevent, respond to, and recover from emergencies.
- ❖ “*Active Shooter Situations*” describes unique challenges involved in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a school-based shooting.

1. Information Sharing

This section of “A Closer Look” provides an overview of the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* and the implications that this and other federal statutes have for information-sharing in the emergency planning process. This section also provides a brief overview of the more limited circumstances when the *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)* may apply to impact information-sharing in the school setting.

While it is critical that schools comply with these laws, there is often confusion about their applicability, which results in schools sharing less than allowed with law enforcement officers or the appropriate authorities even when there is appropriate cause for sharing information. If schools understand when and how these laws apply, they can both ensure public safety and protect student privacy.

While this section of the guide focuses on *FERPA*, and to a lesser extent *HIPAA*, there may be federal and state civil rights and other laws that place restrictions on when and with whom schools may share information. At the federal level, for instance, public elementary and secondary schools are subject to federal civil rights laws, including laws that prohibit discrimination based on disability (the *Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA]*), and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*); race, color, and national origin (*Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*); sex (*Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*); and religion (*Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*). For example, *Section 504 and Title II of the ADA*⁸ prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability, and generally would prohibit unnecessary disclosures of disability status or information related to that disability, to third parties.⁹ Disclosures may be necessary when the student presents a significant, articulable threat to others.¹⁰

Schools are strongly urged to take the time to review these laws, as well as others that apply in their jurisdictions, when working with their community partners to ensure that all parties have a strong understanding of applicable laws when deciding whether to disclose information. In particular, it is critical to train school employees, including contractors, on applicable laws to ensure that schools, school officials, or employees do not release information inappropriately or make decisions about students or release of records based upon myths, fears, or stereotypes related to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.¹¹

⁸ *Title II of the ADA* prohibits discrimination based on disability by public entities, including public schools.

⁹ See 34 CFR § 104.4; 28 CFR § 35.130; “Dear Colleague Letter” and “Frequently Asked Questions on Report Cards and Transcripts for Students with Disabilities Attending Public Elementary and Secondary Schools,” October 2008. Available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-20081017.pdf>.

¹⁰ See 28 CFR 35.139.

¹¹ For more information about applicable civil rights statutes, please visit www.justice.gov/crt, www.ed.gov/ocr or www.ada.gov. Information about appropriate training and management for school resource officers and law enforcement officials in schools may be found at www.cops.usdoj.gov.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

In this section:

- What Is *FERPA*?
- What Are “Education Records?”
- Who May Access *FERPA*-Protected Education Records?
- Balancing Safety and Privacy
 - The Health and Safety Emergency Exception to the Consent Requirement
 - The Law Enforcement Unit Record Exception to the Definition of Education Records
 - Common *FERPA* Misunderstandings
 - Additional Situations With *FERPA* Considerations
- Incorporating *FERPA* Into Your Emergency Planning Process
 - What Information Is *FERPA*-Protected, and When May the School Share It?
 - What Information Is Not *FERPA*-Protected, and When May the School Share It?
- Frequently Asked Questions Pertaining to *FERPA*
- *FERPA* Guidance and Resources

What Is *FERPA*?

FERPA is a federal law that protects the privacy of student *education records*. The law applies to all educational agencies and institutions that receive funds under any U.S. Department of Education program (termed “schools” below). *FERPA* gives parents certain rights with respect to their children’s education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are “eligible students.” The Family Policy Compliance Office at the U.S. Department of Education administers *FERPA*.

FERPA protects the rights of parents or eligible students to

- ❖ Inspect and review education records;
- ❖ Seek to amend education records; and
- ❖ Consent to the disclosure of personally identifiable information (PII) from education records, except as specified by law.

For a thorough review of *FERPA*, in addition to what is provided in this document, please see the implementing regulations for *FERPA*, found in Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), part 99, and the resources and guidance documents listed at the end of this section.

What Are “Education Records?”

Different types of records and information may be protected by *FERPA* if determined to be “education records.” Education records are protected by *FERPA* and are broadly defined as records that are directly related to a student and maintained by an educational agency or institution, or by a party acting for the agency or institution.

The non-exhaustive chart below shows several examples of what types of records generally *are* and *are not* considered to be education records.

Education Records	Not Education Records
Transcripts	Records that are kept in the sole possession of the maker and used only as personal memory aids
Disciplinary records	Law enforcement unit records
Standardized test results	Grades on peer-graded papers before they are collected and recorded by a teacher
Health (including mental health) and family history records	Records created or received by a school after an individual is no longer in attendance and that are not directly related to the individual’s attendance at the school
Records on services provided to students under the <i>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)</i>	Employee records that relate exclusively to an individual in that individual’s capacity as an employee
Records on services and accommodations provided to students under <i>Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973</i> and <i>Title II of the ADA</i> ¹²	Information obtained through a school official’s personal knowledge or observation and not from the student’s education records

See the discussion under “Balancing Safety and Privacy” below for more detail on law enforcement units under *FERPA*, what constitutes a law enforcement unit record, and how these records may be used.

Who May Access *FERPA*-Protected Education Records?

“School officials with a legitimate educational interest” may access *FERPA*-protected education records. Schools determine the criteria for who is considered a school official with a legitimate

¹² Schools should also consider carefully whether information they are requiring for student enrollment in services, including special education services, will tend to identify a student as a person with a disability and determine to what extent laws other than *FERPA* should be considered before release of that information without consent. In addition, release of details about some disabilities or accommodations that permit the student to be identified could constitute discrimination on the basis of disability pursuant to the *ADA* or the *Rehabilitation Act* or other civil rights statutes.

educational interest under *FERPA* regulations, and it generally includes teachers, counselors, school administrators, and other school staff.

The term “school official with a legitimate educational interest” may also include contractors, consultants, volunteers, and other parties if those individuals

- ❖ Perform an institutional service or function for which the agency or institution would otherwise use employees;
- ❖ Are under the direct control of the agency or institution with respect to the use and maintenance of education records; and
- ❖ Are subject to the requirements of 34 CFR § 99.33(a), which specifies that individuals who receive information from education records may use the information only for the purposes for which the disclosure was made and which generally prohibits the redisclosure of PII from education records to any other party without the prior consent of the parent or eligible student. There are, however, exceptions to this prohibition.

In addition, schools must annually notify parents and eligible students of their rights under *FERPA*, and must include in this notification the criteria for who constitutes a school official and what constitutes a legitimate educational interest. The U.S. Department of Education provides model notification statements on its website at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/lea-officials.html>.¹³

This means that if a school wishes to consider non-employee members of its threat assessment team (TAT), its contracted counseling, nursing, service, or security staff, its school resource officers (SROs), and other non-employees as “school officials” who may have access to education records, the school must ensure that these individuals meet the criteria in the bullets above and the criteria in the school’s annual notification of *FERPA* rights. Schools are encouraged to train all school officials who may have access to education records, including contractors, on *FERPA* as well as other applicable laws.

Balancing Safety and Privacy

School officials must balance safety interests and student privacy interests. *FERPA* contains exceptions to the general consent requirement, including the “health or safety emergency exception,” and exceptions to the definition of education records, including “law enforcement unit records,” which provide school officials with tools to support this goal.

The Health or Safety Emergency Exception to the Consent Requirement

FERPA generally requires written consent before disclosing PII from a student’s education records to individuals other than his or her parents. However, the *FERPA* regulations permit school officials to disclose PII from education records without consent to appropriate parties only when there is an actual, impending, or imminent emergency, such as an articulable and

¹³ See 34 CFR § 99.7(a)(3)(iii) for further information. Available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/reg/ferpa/index.html>.

significant threat. Information may be disclosed only to protect the health or safety of students or other individuals. In applying the health and safety exception, note that:

- ❖ Schools have discretion to determine what constitutes a health or safety emergency.
- ❖ “Appropriate parties” typically include law enforcement officials, first responders, public health officials, trained medical personnel, and parents. This *FERPA* exception is temporally limited to the period of the emergency and does not allow for a blanket release of PII. It does not allow disclosures to address emergencies that *might* occur, such as would be the case in emergency preparedness activities.
- ❖ The information that may be disclosed is limited to only PII from an education record that is needed based on the type of emergency.
- ❖ Disclosures based on this exception must be documented in the student’s education records to memorialize the
 - Emergency that formed the basis for the disclosure; and
 - Parties with whom the school shared the PII.

The U.S. Department of Education would not find a school in violation of *FERPA* for disclosing *FERPA*-protected information under the health or safety exception as long as the school had a rational basis, based on the information available at the time, for making its determination that there was an articulable and significant threat to the health or safety of the student or other individuals.

For more information on the health or safety exception, see: “Addressing Emergencies on Campus,” June 2011, available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/pdf/emergency-guidance.pdf> and 34 CFR §§ 99.31(a)(10) and 99.36.

The Law Enforcement Unit Record Exemption to the Definition of Education Records

FERPA defines a “law enforcement unit” as any individual, office, department, division, or other component of an educational agency or institution, such as a unit of commissioned police officers or non-commissioned security guards, that is officially authorized or designated by that agency or institution to

- (i) Enforce any local, state, or federal law, or refer to appropriate authorities a matter for enforcement of any local, state, or federal law against any individual or organization other than the agency or institution itself; or
- (ii) Maintain the physical security and safety of the agency or institution.

Significantly, to be considered a “law enforcement unit” under this definition, an individual or component must be officially authorized or designated to carry out the functions listed above by the school. Schools may designate a traditional law enforcement entity (such as school security staff, school resource officers [SROs], school safety officers, school police, or other school

security personnel) as a law enforcement unit, or opt to designate another non-law enforcement school official to serve as their law enforcement unit, such as a vice principal or another school official.

FERPA does not prevent schools from disclosing information from records maintained by law enforcement that were created for law enforcement purposes by the law enforcement unit to anyone, subject to state law, including outside law enforcement authorities, without the consent of the parent or eligible student during an emergency or otherwise.

Law enforcement unit records, which are not subject to the *FERPA* consent requirements, are defined as records that are

- ❖ Created by a law enforcement unit;
- ❖ Created for a law enforcement purpose; and
- ❖ Maintained by the law enforcement unit.

Law enforcement unit records *do not* include

- ❖ Records created by a law enforcement unit for a law enforcement purpose that are maintained by a component of the school other than the law enforcement unit, such as a principal or guidance counselor;
- ❖ Health records or PII collected about or related to the disability of a student, including information about providing an accommodation; and
- ❖ Records created and maintained by a law enforcement unit exclusively for a non-law enforcement purpose, such as a school disciplinary action or proceeding.

In designating a law enforcement unit and using law enforcement unit records, note that

- ❖ To be given access to PII from a student's education records, law enforcement unit officials who are employed by the school must meet the criteria set forth in the school's *FERPA* notification for school officials with a legitimate educational interest. While law enforcement unit officials are not required to be school officials under *FERPA*, many schools have found that it is useful for them to be school officials so that they may access education records that may be necessary to ensure school safety. For instance, if a student has been suspended for a period of time (a fact that would be recorded in the student's education records), the law enforcement unit could need to know this in case the student attempts to enter the building when not permitted to do so.
- ❖ A school's law enforcement unit officials must protect the privacy of education records they receive and may disclose them only in compliance with *FERPA*. For that reason, we recommend that law enforcement unit records be maintained separately from education records.

For more information on law enforcement unit records and *FERPA*, refer to the following sources:

- ❖ “Addressing Emergencies on Campus,” June 2011
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/pdf/emergency-guidance.pdf>
- ❖ The discussion in the preamble to the final rule in the Federal Register published Dec. 9, 2008, starting on page 74836
<http://www2.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/finrule/2008-4/120908a.pdf>
- ❖ Family Policy Compliance Office website
<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/index.html>
- ❖ The regulatory definition of “Law Enforcement Unit” under *FERPA* in 34 CFR § 99.8(a) available at <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/retrieveECFR?gp=&SID=ae535d41f8bb03bedfef79634883360f&n=34y1.1.1.1.33&r=PART&ty=HTML#34:1.1.1.1.33.1.132.8>

Common *FERPA* Misunderstandings

School administrators and their partner organizations must understand *FERPA* and its implications, because misinterpretations of the law and subsequent delays in information-sharing can hinder first responders’ efforts to provide necessary assistance in a health or safety emergency.

Sharing Personal Observation or Knowledge

Misinterpreting *FERPA* can lead school administrators to miss opportunities to share crucial information that could prevent an emergency situation. For instance, some schools incorrectly believe that information obtained from a school official’s personal observations or knowledge is protected by *FERPA*. In fact, personal observation or knowledge is generally not considered to be part of the student’s education records (see “What Are ‘Education Records’” above) and therefore may be disclosed. For example, if a teacher overhears a student making threatening remarks to other students, the teacher is not prohibited from sharing that information with appropriate authorities, including the parents of the students who were threatened.

However, if a school official learns of information about a student through his or her official role in creating or maintaining an education record, then that information would be covered by *FERPA*. For instance, if a principal suspends a student, the principal would not be permitted to non-consensually disclose that information (unless the disclosure met one of the exceptions in *FERPA* to consent) because he or she gained personal knowledge of that information in making that disciplinary determination.

Releasing Directory Information

In some circumstances, schools may be able to disclose “directory information” to prevent an emergency situation. Directory information means information contained in a student’s education record that would not generally be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed. Some examples of directory information include a student’s name, address, telephone number, or e-mail address. Schools must follow certain requirements in publicly designating “directory information,” and they may not disclose directory information from a student’s

education record if the parent or eligible student has opted out of allowing that disclosure. For example, assuming that the parents' cell phone numbers have been properly designated as "directory information," what if the parents have not opted out of the disclosure of such "directory information," and a flood displaced families from their homes and these children are brought to a shelter? The school may disclose those parents' cell phone numbers to an emergency management agency that is trying to locate the parents.

Additional Situations With *FERPA* Considerations

FERPA has implications in a variety of different situations, and new questions arise as schools become more creative and innovative in developing their campus safety plans. In many cases, however, it is helpful to review the *FERPA* basics to help you clearly think through each scenario. The following are some scenarios that may arise.

❖ Infectious Disease

Under the health or safety emergency exception, school officials may, without consent, disclose PII from education records to appropriate parties in connection with an emergency. In the case of an influenza outbreak, for instance, if school officials determine that an emergency exists, they may share immunization records with parties such as state and local public health officials whose knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of students or others in the school community. Under this exception, schools may share information only during the limited period of time connected with the emergency. A blanket release of information is not allowed. You must instead determine what information to disclose on a case-by-case basis depending on the particular threat.

❖ Threat Assessment Teams

Some educational agencies and institutions may need assistance in determining whether a health or safety emergency exists for purposes of complying with *FERPA*. Federal agencies encourage schools to implement a threat assessment program, including the establishment of a multidisciplinary threat assessment team that utilizes the expertise of representatives from mental health service providers, persons familiar with emergency procedures, and law enforcement agencies in the community.

The threat assessment team must comply with applicable civil rights and other federal and state laws. Under a properly implemented threat assessment program, schools can respond to student behavior that raises safety concerns that are not based on assumptions, stereotypes, or myths about people with disabilities (including mental health-related disabilities) or people of a particular race, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, or sex.

If a threat assessment team member meets the definition of a school official (as a party to whom the school has outsourced administrative functions or services) with a legitimate educational interest under *FERPA*, (see "Who May Access *FERPA*-Protected Education Records" above), then he or she would be able to access students' education records in which he or she has legitimate educational interests. A threat assessment team member who is appropriately designated as a school official, however, may not disclose PII from

education records to anyone without consent or unless one of the exceptions to consent under *FERPA*, such as the health or safety emergency exception, applies.

❖ **Security Videos**

Schools are increasingly using security cameras as a tool to monitor and improve student safety. Images of students captured on security videotapes that are created and maintained by the school's law enforcement unit for a law enforcement purpose are not considered education records under *FERPA*. Accordingly, these videotapes may be shared with parents of students whose images are on the video and with outside law enforcement authorities, as appropriate.

Incorporating *FERPA* Into Your Emergency Planning Process

Below are critical questions and concepts that schools should discuss with their community partners while in the process of developing or revising an emergency management plan. While building partnerships is critical, in gathering information to support these partnerships, schools must also take steps to consider student privacy and civil rights and other laws as well as their mission of safety. Be sure to refer to the sections elsewhere in this guidance to review any concepts with which you are unfamiliar.

What Information Is *FERPA*-Protected, and When May the School Share It?

Education records are protected by *FERPA*, and schools may generally only PII from those records only with written consent from a parent or eligible student, unless a *FERPA* exception to consent applies. (See “What Are ‘Education Records’” above.) The following are examples of such exceptions.

Example: At the start of flu season, your local public health agency requests the names of those students showing influenza-like symptoms, as well as their parents’ contact information. You know that you may not disclose PII from a student’s education records without consent if there is not a health or safety emergency or another exception to consent under *FERPA* that applies. So, to facilitate this sharing of information, you opt to develop a consent form that identifies students’ names and parent contact information as specific PII from student education records. And you would like to share the form with the local public health agency, as well as the purpose of the disclosure. The form gives parents and eligible students the option to allow or to not allow this sharing of information. After collecting the signed and dated consent forms, for the students for whom you received consent you begin to share with the local health agency the names of students who are showing influenza-like symptoms and their parents’ contact information. Your purpose of this sharing of PII is to help so the health agency is able to conduct real-time surveillance to prevent the spread of the illness. (See “What Is *FERPA*” above.)

Example: Your school’s threat assessment team includes representatives from your community partners, and you have properly designated them as “school officials with a legitimate educational interest.” (See “Who May Access *FERPA*-Protected Records” above.) The local law enforcement representative on your team does not share with his police chief or other law enforcement official the PII that he obtains from a student’s

education records in his capacity as a threat assessment team member while working to identify possible threats because he knows that this is not permitted. Several months after the threat assessment team initially convened to review a collection of behaviors and communications concerning a particular student and determined that there was not sufficient information demonstrating that the student posed a threat, the team learns that the student has now communicated his intent to harm the school principal. At this juncture, the law enforcement representative (and other members of the threat assessment team) shares pertinent PII from education records with appropriate parties so they can take steps, such as consulting with a police agency, to protect the health or safety of the principal (in this case). (See also the discussion of threat assessment teams under “Additional Situations With *FERPA* Considerations” above.)

Example: At the beginning of the school year, your school notified parents and eligible students that you had designated students’ names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses as “directory information,” explaining to them that you would disclose this information upon request to anyone contacting the school. In your notice, you explained how and by when they could opt out. When a reporter contacts your institution requesting the directory information about a student who is under 18, you check to see whether the student’s parents opted out of the disclosure of directory information. Because the student’s parents did not opt out of the school’s directory information policy, you provide that directory information to the reporter. (See “Common *FERPA* Misunderstandings” above.)

Example: A student has a severe allergic reaction to peanuts during lunch. The school nurse administers epinephrine and then calls an ambulance in accordance with applicable federal and state laws. When the emergency medical technicians (EMTs) arrive, the nurse discloses PII from the student’s education record to the EMTs without obtaining parental consent under the health or safety emergency exception. (See “Balancing Safety and Privacy” above.)

What Information Is Not *FERPA*-Protected and When May the School Share It?

Records that are created and maintained by a school’s law enforcement unit for a law enforcement purpose are not protected by *FERPA*, and there are no *FERPA* restrictions on the sharing of information in law enforcement unit records. (See “What Are ‘Education Records’” and “Balancing Safety and Privacy” above.)

Example: Your school contracts with the law enforcement agency in your county to bring in an SRO and you properly designate the officer as a “school official with a legitimate educational interest.” (See “Who May Access *FERPA*-Protected Records?” above.) You also properly designate the SRO as your school’s law enforcement unit. (See “Balancing Safety and Privacy” above.) The SRO knows that she may not redisclose to her home agency PII that she obtains from a student’s education records while serving in her SRO capacity, unless there is a health or safety emergency or another *FERPA* exception to consent that would apply. However, she shares her law enforcement unit records about a student who was arrested for smoking marijuana on campus with other law enforcement officials because she knows that law enforcement unit records are not protected by *FERPA*.

Are Processes and Protocols, Including Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), in Place for Information Sharing and Record Keeping That Comply With *FERPA*?

It is important for schools to consider entering into MOUs with law enforcement and their other community partners to formalize roles, responsibilities, and protocols. MOUs can be tailored to the needs of the individual schools in the jurisdiction. Any policies regarding information sharing between the school and the law enforcement agency, however, must comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws, including *FERPA*. While information-sharing MOUs should be developed regarding what information can be shared between departments and what information is protected, no provision in an MOU can override a school's obligations under *FERPA*.

Frequently Asked Questions Pertaining to *FERPA*

Q: To what entities does *FERPA* apply?

A: *FERPA* applies to educational agencies and institutions that receive funds under any program administered by the U.S. Department of Education. This includes virtually all public schools and school districts, and most private and public postsecondary institutions, including medical and other professional schools.

Private and religious schools at the elementary and secondary school levels generally do not receive funds from the U.S. Department of Education and, therefore, are not subject to *FERPA*.

Q: Does an interagency agreement with partners such as the state or local health department enable a school to non-consensually disclose education records?

A: No. Interagency agreements do not supersede the consent requirements under *FERPA*. Although an interagency agreement would be a helpful tool for planning purposes, schools must comply with *FERPA*'s requirements regarding the disclosure of PII from students' education records.

Q: Under the health or safety emergency exception, may a school non-consensually disclose PII from a student's education records to the media?

A: No, you generally may not disclose *FERPA*-protected information to the media. While the media play a role in alerting the community of a health epidemic or a violent incident outbreak, they generally do not have a role in protecting the health or safety of individual students or others at the school.

Q: When would the health or safety exception apply?

A: Under *FERPA*, an emergency means a situation in which there is an articulable and significant threat to the health or safety of students or other individuals. This determination must be made by the school.

Q: Do I need to tell parents and eligible students or otherwise document when I have disclosed PII from their education records without consent under a health or safety emergency?

A: Within a reasonable period of time after a disclosure is made under the health or safety exception, a school must record in the student's education records the articulable and significant threat that formed the basis for the disclosure, and the parties to whom the information was disclosed. Parents and eligible students have a right to inspect and review the record of disclosure, but do not need to be proactively informed that records have been disclosed.

Q: Can members of our threat assessment team have access to student education records?

A: School officials with legitimate educational interests may have access to a student's education records. Members of a threat assessment team who are not school employees may be designated as such if they are under the direct control of the school with respect to the maintenance and use of PII from education records; are subject to the requirements of 34 CFR § 99.33(a) governing the use and redisclosure of PII from education records; and otherwise meet the school's criteria for being school officials with legitimate educational interests.

Members of a threat assessment team who are considered school officials with a legitimate educational interest generally cannot non-consensually redisclose PII from a student's education records to which he or she was privy as part of the team. However, if a threat assessment team determines that a health or safety emergency exists, members may non-consensually redisclose PII from a student's education records on behalf of the school to appropriate officials under the health or safety emergency exception.

For example, a representative from the city police who serves on a school's threat assessment team generally could not redisclose, without consent, PII from a student's education records to the city police during the initial discussions about a particular student. However, once the threat assessment team determines that a health or safety emergency exists, as defined under *FERPA*, the representative may redisclose, without consent, PII from a student's education records on behalf of the school to appropriate officials. (See the discussion under "Additional Situations with *FERPA* Considerations" above.)

Q: How does *FERPA* interact with the *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)*?

A: The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services jointly developed guidance on the application of *FERPA* and *HIPAA*. This guidance explains that records that are protected by *FERPA* are exempt from the *HIPAA* Privacy Rule. Accordingly, school officials must follow the requirements of *FERPA* with regard to the disclosure of records protected by *FERPA*. Please see the guidance at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/doc/ferpa-hipaa-guidance.pdf> for more information, as well as the *HIPAA* guidance in this "A Closer Look" section.

Q: Who should I contact for more information related to *FERPA*?

A: The U.S. Department of Education’s Family Policy Compliance Office is available to respond to any questions about *FERPA*. For quick responses to routine questions, please e-mail the Department of Education at FERPA@ed.gov. For more in-depth technical assistance or a more formal response, you may call the Family Policy Compliance Office at 202-260-3887 or write to them at

Family Policy Compliance Office
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20202-8520

Q: What are some of the other federal and state laws relating to emergency management planning that are relevant to access to and sharing of information about students?

A: As noted in the introduction to this “A Closer Look” section, schools may also be subject to federal and state civil rights laws that protect the disclosure of information about students. Schools and their community partners should review guidance from the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice on any applicable civil rights or other statutes governing privacy and information sharing and discuss their implications for emergency management and related planning processes. At a minimum, in determining what constitutes an “emergency,” schools and their partners must base their decisions on actual risks and not on assumptions, stereotypes, fears, or myths about people with disabilities (including mental health-related disabilities) or people of a particular race, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, or sex.^{14, 15}

***FERPA* Guidance and Resources**

The Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO) at the U.S. Department of Education administers *FERPA*. FPCO has developed, and continues to develop, extensive guidance pertaining to the implementation of *FERPA* and emergency situations. For more detailed information or additional guidance, please see the documents below and the FPCO website at www.ed.gov/fpco.

¹⁴ See Title 28 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 35.139.

¹⁵ In enacting the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, Congress relied on *School Board of Nassau County, Florida v. Arline*, 480 U.S. 273, (1987) to “acknowledge[] that society's accumulated myths and fears about disability and disease are as handicapping as are the physical limitations that flow from actual impairment.” As explained in the preamble to the Justice Department's 1991 *ADA* regulation, codification of the *Arline* standard was deemed essential if the *ADA* is to achieve its goal of protecting disabled individuals from discrimination based on prejudice, stereotypes, or unfounded fear, while giving appropriate weight to legitimate concerns, such as the need to avoid exposing others to significant health and safety risks. See 28 C.F.R. pt. 36, app. C, sec. 36.208. This rationale applies with equal force to making determinations based on stereotypes about other characteristics protected by *Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)

In this section:

- What Is *HIPAA*?
- How Does *HIPAA* Apply in Schools?
- *HIPAA* Guidance and Resources

What Is *HIPAA*?

The *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)* and its implementing regulations, commonly known as the *HIPAA Privacy Rule* and the *HIPAA Security Rule*, protect the privacy and security of individually identifiable health information, called protected health information or PHI, held by health plans, health care clearinghouses, and most health care providers, collectively known as covered entities, and their business associates (entities that have access to individuals' health information to perform work on behalf of a covered entity).

The Privacy Rule, or *Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information*, establishes national standards to protect the privacy of individuals' identifiable health information. In doing so, the Privacy Rule sets forth the circumstances under which covered entities and their business associates may use or disclose an individual's health information, requires safeguards to protect the information, and gives individuals rights, including rights to examine and obtain a copy of their health records and to request corrections.

A major goal of the Privacy Rule is to ensure that individuals' health information is properly protected while allowing the flow of health information needed to provide and promote high quality health care and to protect the public's health and well-being. Given that the health care marketplace is diverse, the Privacy Rule is designed to be flexible and comprehensive to cover the variety of uses and disclosures that need to be addressed.

The *Security Rule*, or *Security Standards for the Protection of Electronic Protected Health Information*, establishes a national set of security standards for protecting health information that is held or transferred in electronic form. The Security Rule sets out the technical, administrative, and physical safeguards that covered entities and business associates must put in place to secure individuals' electronic health information. The Security Rule is designed to be flexible and scalable, and technology neutral, so a covered entity or business associate can implement policies, procedures, and technologies that are appropriate for the entity's particular size, organizational structure, and risks to consumers' electronic health information.

The HHS Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has responsibility for administering and enforcing the Privacy and Security Rules.

How Does *HIPAA* Apply in Schools?

Generally, *HIPAA* does not apply to student health information maintained by a school. While schools and school districts may maintain student health records, these records are in most cases not protected by *HIPAA*. Rather, student health information maintained at a school would be considered education records protected by the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*.

HIPAA may apply however to patient records at a university hospital, which may include records on students and non-students, or to the health records of non-students at a university health clinic.

During the emergency planning process, if you believe health information to which access may be needed is covered by *HIPAA*, you should consult the guidance and resources below for further information about how *HIPAA* applies.

***HIPAA* Guidance and Resources**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has developed, and continues to develop, extensive guidance pertaining to the implementation of *HIPAA* Privacy Rule and emergency situations. The OCR website has guidance about the intersection between *HIPAA* and *FERPA* and the release of PHI for common emergency preparedness issues and public health purposes, such as terrorism preparedness and outbreak investigations. For more detailed information or additional guidance, please see the HHS OCR website at <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/index.html> and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/U.S. Department of Education *HIPAA/FERPA* guide at <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/coveridentities/hipaaferpajointguide.pdf>

2. Psychological First Aid for Schools (PFA-S)

Psychological First Aid for Schools (PFA-S) is an evidence-informed intervention model to assist students, staff, and families in the immediate aftermath of an emergency and can be used by any trained staff member or community partner. Trauma-related distress can have a long-term impact. PFA-S uses brief interventions to produce positive results that last. PFA-S is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by emergencies, allows for the expression of difficult feelings and assists students in developing coping strategies and constructive actions to deal with fear and anxiety. A growing body of research shows that there are brief, effective interventions that have a long-lasting positive influence on trauma-related distress.

PFA-S is intended for students, school personnel, and families who have been exposed to a disaster or other emergency. Whether an emergency occurs on school grounds or in the community at large, schools serve as a central location for professionals to assist children, families, school personnel, and school partners.

PFA-S is most effective immediately following or even during an incident. In some circumstances, assuming the safety of students and staff has been ensured, PFA-S can be initiated while an incident is still occurring, such as in shelter-in-place or lockdown situations.

Students and staff may experience a broad range of reactions (e.g., physical, cognitive, psychological, behavioral, spiritual) to an emergency. Some of these reactions can cause distress

that interferes with adaptive coping. Support from informed, compassionate, and caring professionals can help students and staff members recover from these reactions. PFA-S has the potential to decrease the likelihood of mental health problems or long-term difficulties by identifying individuals who may need additional services and linking them to such services as needed.¹⁶

PFA-S assists students, staff, and families by

- ❖ Establishing a positive connection in a non-intrusive, compassionate manner;
- ❖ Enhancing immediate and ongoing safety and providing physical and emotional comfort;
- ❖ Calming and orienting those who are emotionally overwhelmed or distraught;
- ❖ Helping to identify their immediate needs and concerns and offering practical assistance and information to help address these needs and concerns;
- ❖ Empowering individuals to take an active role in their recovery, by acknowledging their coping efforts and strengths, and supporting adaptive coping; and,
- ❖ When appropriate, linking those in need to other relevant school or community resources such as school counseling services, peer support programs, afterschool activities, tutoring, primary care physicians, local recovery systems, mental health services, employee assistance programs, public-sector services, and other relief organizations.

Training School Staff

Because PFA-S is not psychotherapy, an extended “treatment,” or a stand-alone mental health intervention, any trained staff member, regardless of whether he or she has had formal mental health training, can deliver aspects of PFA-S and can contribute to the school recovery by functioning within the PFA framework. Schools can find training resources including the PFA-S Field Operations Guide, at <http://www.nctsn.org/content/psychological-first-aid-schoolspfa>. Similarly, trained members of community emergency response agencies and mental health professionals may provide PFA-S. During and after an emergency, teachers and other staff are a critical link in promoting resilience, in recognizing the signs of traumatic stress, and in helping students and their families regain a sense of normalcy.

3. School Climate and Emergencies

“School climate” describes a range of campus conditions, including safety, relationships and engagement, and the environment, that may influence student learning and well-being. Positive school climates that promote student learning and well-being often feature:

- ❖ Safe environments free of violence, bullying, harassment, and substance use;

¹⁶Melissa Brymer, Matt Taylor, Pia Escudero, Anne Jacobs, Mindy Kronenberg, Robert Macy, Lou Ann Mock, Linda Payne, Robert Pynoos, and Juliet Vogel, *Psychological First Aid For Schools: Field Operations Guide, 2nd Edition*. Los Angeles: National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2012.

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- ❖ Appropriate facilities and physical surroundings;
 - ❖ Supportive academic settings;
 - ❖ Clear and fair disciplinary policies;
 - ❖ Respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community; and
 - ❖ Available social, emotional, and behavioral supports.

Positive school climates are inclusive of and responsive to students of all backgrounds, regardless of race, color, national origin, language, disability, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Research shows that creating positive school climates can help districts, schools, and teachers meet key goals, including: boosting student achievement and closing achievement gaps; increasing high school graduation rates; decreasing teacher turnover and increasing teacher satisfaction; and turning around low-performing schools. Positive school climates also enhance safety in the school and community by increasing communication between students, families, and faculty. At the same time, schools reduce various forms of harm to students that can stem from negative school climates, including violence, bullying, and even suicide.

A positive school climate that provides students with ready access to emotional and behavioral supports can affect the capacity of students and staff to prevent, respond to, and recover from emergencies.

Prevention

A positive school climate can help to prevent emergencies because it can reduce the incidence of behaviors that can contribute to crisis (e.g., violence, bullying, harassment, substance abuse). Further, schools with positive school climates engage students in developing strong relationships with staff and peers, increasing the likelihood that students will quickly report potential threats to trusted adults within the school.

Response

Schools with positive school climates teach students the social and emotional competencies that enable them to develop persistence, tolerance of frustration, and ability to manage their emotions during an emergency. The teachers, counselors, school resources officers, and other staff who create positive school climates train regularly on child and adolescent development, and on how to respond appropriately to a variety of student behaviors so they are able to de-escalate aggressive behavior before it becomes a threat to school safety.

Recovery

A positive school climate can help in the recovery from an emergency because it represents a commitment, even prior to an emergency, to providing emotional and mental health services and supports to all members of the community. Schools with such a climate create an environment that recognizes the importance of social and emotional health, and so support the recovery of all members of the school community and promote an understanding that individual needs will vary in a post-emergency situation.

The following steps when implemented as part of a single, comprehensive, and integrated strategy for improving student health and safety will help schools promote a positive school climate.

Conduct a Comprehensive Needs Assessment

School communities are complex systems that include multiple stakeholders and interconnecting environmental factors that influence student health and safety. As such, comprehensive needs assessments of school climate including school engagement, school safety, and the school environment as elements to be evaluated can provide schools with the data support needed to pursue comprehensive approaches to improving school climate. A comprehensive picture of school health and safety can be created by utilizing needs assessments that include student perceptions and, where appropriate, parent and staff perceptions, to help schools identify key issues in need of attention. By monitoring indicators such as the frequency and severity of student risk behaviors, and perceptions of their safety, schools may identify threats to school safety and then use this information to implement the appropriate intervention or program to improve school safety. These data can be most effective when they are used regularly for decision-making and are disaggregated by different groups to determine how they experience the school environment. If a student survey is used to assess culture and climate, student privacy must be protected, including in accordance with the *Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment*, 20 U.S.C. 1232, if applicable.

A number of these surveys are in the compendium of school climate measures on the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments' website at <http://safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/index.php?id=133>.

The center also houses archived webinars that provide information on how to use these surveys and the data that they collect. Visit at <http://safesupportiveschools.ed.gov/index.php?id=65>.

Use Multi-Tiered Interventions and Supports

School climate can be enhanced by a data-driven, multi-tiered framework that provides a continuum of behavioral supports and interventions to improve student behavior and achievement. A three-tiered framework would comprise the following:

1. School wide or universal interventions and supports focus both on developing expected behaviors and social-emotional competence, and on preventing problem behavior.
2. A second tier of interventions targets groups of students who are at elevated levels of risk or exhibiting problem behavior (such as bullying). These groups of students can be identified more easily, and their needs or behavior can be addressed more effectively when a school wide foundation is in place.
3. A third tier of interventions targets individual students, including traumatized youths, who are at even more elevated levels of academic and social-emotional behavioral need and risk.

While interventions for students who are at elevated levels of risk address their needs and problem behaviors, they should also build the skills that support thriving in life and resiliency in crisis. Using an evidence-based, multi-tiered behavioral framework has been found to improve

school climate by reducing problem behaviors like bullying, drug abuse, and poor attendance, while making students feel safer and improving academic performance. Implementation of a school-wide framework provides a structure for schools in which to customize and organize the varied practices and programs they need to provide to their students based on data on student needs and local resources. Further, such a framework may help schools to better identify students struggling with trauma post-event, and select appropriate interventions to help them to recover. For more information about a multi-tiered behavioral framework, visit the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports available at <http://www.pbis.org>.

Promote Social and Emotional Competencies

Social and emotional learning is important to enable individuals to learn to understand and manage their emotions and relationships, and to make good decisions. Social-emotional learning can help individuals stop and think before they react, control their response to stress, develop supportive and caring relationships, persist through challenge, seek help, and pay attention to theirs and others' needs and feelings. These and other social and emotional competencies can help individuals prepare for and respond to emergencies. Students are more likely to develop such competencies when they have good relationships with adults, and when the adults model these competencies.

For more information about teaching social and emotional competencies, visit <http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov>. For additional information on how social and emotional learning may be integrated into a multi-tiered framework, visit <http://www.pbis.org>.

4. Active Shooter Situations

Police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical services technicians (first responders) who come to a school because of a 911 call involving gunfire face a daunting task. Though the objective remains the same – protect students and staff – the threat of an “*active shooter*” incident is different than responding to a natural disaster or many other emergencies.

Emergency calls can involve actual or future threats of physical violence. This violence might be directed not only in or at the school building, students, staff, and campus but also at nearby buildings on or off school grounds.

“*Active shooter situations*” are defined¹⁷ as those where an individual is “actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, schools face *active shooter situations* as well.

The better first responders and school personnel are able to discern these threats and react swiftly, the more lives can be saved. This is particularly true in an *active shooter situation* at a school where law enforcement responds to a 911 call of shots fired. Many young and innocent lives are at risk in such a concentrated space. This is why it is critical that schools work with first

¹⁷ Other gun-related incidents that may occur in a school environment are not defined as *active shooter* incidents because they do not meet this definition. Instead, they may involve a single shot fired, accidental discharge of a weapon, or incidents that are not ongoing.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Active Shooter, How to Respond*. Washington, DC: Author, October 2008. Available at http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active_shooter_booklet.pdf.

responders, emergency management staff, and all community partners to identify, prepare, prevent, and effectively respond to an *active shooter situation* in a coordinated fashion.

Active shooter situations are unpredictable and evolve quickly. Because of this, individuals must be prepared to deal with an *active shooter situation* before law enforcement officers arrive on the scene.

Preparing for an *Active Shooter Situation*

Planning

As with any threat or hazard that is included in a school's EOP, the planning team will establish goals, objectives, and courses of action for an annex. These plans will be impacted by the assessments conducted at the outset of the planning process and updated as ongoing assessments occur. As courses of action are developed, the planning team should consider a number of issues, including, but not limited to:

- ❖ How to evacuate or lock down students, staff, and visitors, including those who are not with staff or in a classroom (e.g., in the hall, bathroom, break room). Personnel involved in such planning should pay attention to disability-related accessibility concerns when advising on shelter sites and evacuation routes.
- ❖ How to evacuate when the primary evacuation route is unusable.
- ❖ How to select effective shelter-in-place locations (optimal locations have thick walls, solid doors with locks, minimal interior windows, first-aid emergency kits, communication devices and duress alarms).
- ❖ How the school community will be notified that there is an *active shooter* on school grounds. This could be done through the use of familiar terms, sounds, lights, and electronic communications such as text messages. Include in the courses of action how to communicate with those who have language barriers or need other accommodations, such as visual signals or alarms to advise deaf students, staff, and parents about what is occurring. School wide "reverse 911-style" text messages sent to predetermined group distribution lists can be very helpful in this regard. Posting this protocol near locations where an all-school announcement can be broadcast (e.g., by the microphone used for the public announcement system) may save lives by preventing students and staff from stepping into harm's way.
- ❖ How students and staff will know when the building is safe.

The planning team may want to include functions in the *Active Shooter* annex that are also addressed in other functional annexes. For example, evacuation will be different during an *active shooter situation* than it would be for a fire.

Additional considerations are included in the "Responding to an *Active Shooter*" and "After an *Active Shooter Incident*" sections below.

Sharing Information With First Responders

The planning process is not complete until the school EOP is shared with first responders. The planning process must include preparing and making available to first responders an up-to-date and well-documented site assessment as well as any other information that would assist them. These materials should include building schematics and photos of both the inside and the outside, and include information about door and window locations, and locks and access controls. Emergency responders should also have advance information on where students, staff, and others with disabilities as well as those with access and functional needs are likely to be sheltering or escaping, generally in physically accessible locations, along accessible routes, or in specific classrooms. Building strong partnerships with law enforcement officers, fire officials, and EMS technician includes ensuring they also know the location of available public address systems, two-way communications systems, security cameras, and alarm controls. Equally important is information on access to utility controls, medical supplies, and fire extinguishers.

Providing the detailed information listed above to first responders allows them to rapidly move through a school during an emergency, to ensure areas are safe, and to tend people in need. It is critically important to share this information with law enforcement and other first responders before an emergency occurs. Law enforcement agencies have secure websites where this information is stored for many schools, businesses, public venues, and other locations. All of these can be provided to first responders and viewed in drills, exercises, and walk-throughs.

Technology and tools with the same information (e.g., a portable USB drive that is compatible with computers used by first responders) should be maintained at the front of the school, in a lock box, or other secured location from which school officials can immediately provide it to responding officials or first responders can directly access it. The location of these materials at the school should be known by and accessible to a number of individuals to ensure ready access in an emergency. Every building should have more than one individual charged with meeting first responders to provide them with the school site assessment, the school EOP and any other details about school safety and the facility.¹⁹ All parties should know who these key contacts are.

Exercises

Most schools practice evacuation drills for fires and protective measures for tornadoes, but far fewer schools practice for *active shooter situations*. To be prepared for an *active shooter* incident, schools should train their staff, students, and families, as appropriate, in what to expect and how to react. If students are involved, to select the appropriate exercise the school should consider the ages of the students. In a study of 84 *active shooter* events that occurred between 2000 and 2010, 34 percent involved schools.²⁰

Good planning includes conducting drills which must include first responders and school resource officers (where applicable). Exercises with these valuable partners are one of the most effective and efficient ways to ensure that everyone knows not only his or her roles, but also the

¹⁹ See also, <http://www.ready.gov>.

²⁰ J. Pete Blair with M. Hunter Martaindale, *United States Active Shooter Events from 2000 to 2010: Training and Equipment Implications*. San Marcos, Texas: Texas State University, 2013. Available at <http://policeforum.org/library/critical-issues-in-policing-series/Blair-UnitedStatesActiveShooterEventsfrom2000to2010Report-Final.pdf>.

roles of others at the scene. These exercises should include walks through school buildings to allow law enforcement to provide input on shelter sites as well as familiarize first responders with the location.

Each person carries a threefold responsibility.

- ❑ First: Learn the signs of a potentially volatile situation and ways to prevent an incident.
- ❑ Second: Learn the best steps for survival when faced with an *active shooter situation*.
- ❑ Third: Be prepared to work with law enforcement during the response.

Preventing an *Active Shooter Situation*

Warning Signs

No profile exists for an *active shooter*; however, research indicates there may be signs or indicators. Schools should learn the signs of a potentially volatile situation that may develop into an *active shooter situation* and proactively seek ways to prevent an incident with internal resources, or additional external assistance.

In 2002, the Safe School Initiative (SSI) was completed by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Secret Service, examining 41 K–12 student attackers involving 37 incidents in the United States from 1973 through May 2000.²¹ These research results, though focused on targeted school violence and not on *active shooter situations*, remain highly useful as a guide for law enforcement officials, educators, and mental health practitioners.

The study identified 10 key findings for the development of strategies to address targeted school violence:

- ❖ There is no accurate or useful profile of students who have engaged in targeted school violence.
- ❖ Incidents of targeted violence at school are rarely sudden, impulsive acts.
- ❖ Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker’s idea and/or the plan to attack.
- ❖ Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.

²¹ Robert Fein, Bryan Vossekuil, William Pollack, Randy Borum, William Modzeleski, and Marisa Reddy, *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Secret Service, 2004. Available at <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf>.

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- ❖ Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.
 - ❖ Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant loss or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.
 - ❖ Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.
 - ❖ Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
 - ❖ In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
 - ❖ Despite prompt law enforcement officer responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.²²

By highlighting common pre-attack behaviors displayed by past offenders, federal researchers have sought to enhance the detection and prevention of tragic attacks of violence, including active shooting incidents. Several agencies within the federal government continue to explore incidents of targeted violence in the effort to identify these potential “warning signs.” In 2002, the FBI published a monograph on workplace violence, including problematic behaviors of concern that may telegraph violent ideations and plans.²³ In 2007, the U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Department of Education, and the FBI collaborated to produce the report *Campus Attacks, Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Learning*, which examined lethal or attempted lethal attacks at U.S. universities and colleges from 1900 to 2008. The report was published in 2010, and featured several key observations related to pre-attack behaviors, including the following:

- ❖ In only 13 percent of the cases did subjects make verbal and/or written threats to cause harm to the target. These threats were both veiled and direct, and were conveyed to the target or to a third party about the target.
- ❖ In 19 percent of the cases, stalking or harassing behavior was reported prior to the attack. These behaviors occurred within the context of a current or former romantic relationship, or in academic and other non-romantic settings. They took on various forms, including written communications (conventional and electronic), telephonic contact, and harassment of the target and/or the target’s friends and/or family. Subjects also followed, visited, or damaged property belonging to target(s) or their families prior to the attack.
- ❖ In only 10 percent of the cases did the subject engage in physically aggressive acts toward the targets. These behaviors took the form of physical assaults, menacing actions with weapons, or repeated physical violence to intimate partners.

²² Bryan Vossekuil, Robert Fein, Marisa Reddy, Randy Borum, and William Modzeleski, *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. Department of Education and U.S. Secret Service, 2004. Available at <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf>.

²³ U.S. Department of Justice FBI Academy, *Workplace Violence: Issues in Response*. Quantico, Va.: Author, 2002. Available at <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/workplace-violence>.

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- ❖ Concerning behaviors were observed by friends, family, associates, professors, or law enforcement officers in 31 percent of the cases. These behaviors included, but were not limited to paranoid ideas, delusional statements, changes in personality or performance, disciplinary problems on campus, depressed mood, suicidal ideation, non-specific threats of violence, increased isolation, “odd” or “bizarre” behavior, and interest in or acquisition of weapons.

Specialized units in the federal government (such as the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit) continue to support behaviorally based operational assessments of persons of concern in a variety of settings (e.g., schools, workplaces, places of worship) who appear to be on a trajectory toward a violent act. A review of current research, threat assessment literature, and active shooting incidents, combined with the extensive case experience of the Behavioral Analysis Unit, suggest that there are observable pre-attack behaviors which, if recognized, could lead to the disruption of a planned attack.²⁴ While checklists of various warning signs are often of limited use in isolation, there are some behavioral indicators that should prompt further exploration and attention from law enforcement officers and/or school safety stakeholders. These behaviors often include

- ❖ Development of a personal grievance;
- ❖ Contextually inappropriate and recent acquisitions of multiple weapons;
- ❖ Contextually inappropriate and recent escalation in target practice and weapons training;
- ❖ Contextually inappropriate and recent interest in explosives;
- ❖ Contextually inappropriate and intense interest or fascination with previous shootings or mass attacks; and
- ❖ Experience of a significant real or perceived personal loss in the weeks and/or months leading up to the attack, such as a death, breakup, divorce or loss of a job.
- ❖ Few offenders had previous arrests for violent crimes.

²⁴ See Frederick Calhoun and Stephen Weston, *Contemporary Threat Management: A Practical Guide for Identifying, Assessing, and Managing Individuals of Violent Intent* (San Diego, CA: Specialized Training Services, 2003); Gene Deisinger, Marisa Randazzo, Daniel O’Neill, and Jenna Savage, *The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment and Management Teams* (Stoneham, MA: Applied Risk Management, 2008); Robert Fein, Bryan Vossekuil, and Gwen Holden, *Threat Assessment: An Approach to Prevent Targeted Violence* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, 1995); John Monahan, Henry Steadman, Eric Silver, Paul Appelbaum, Pamela Robbins, Edward Mulvey, Loren Roth, Thomas Grisso, and Steven Banks, *Rethinking Risk Assessment: The MacArthur Study of Mental Disorder and Violence* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001); Bryan Vossekuil, Robert Fein, Marisa Reddy, Randy Borum, and William Modzeleski, *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Secret Service, 2004).

Threat Assessment Teams

As described in the previous section, research shows that perpetrators of targeted acts of violence engage in both covert and overt behaviors preceding their attacks. They consider, plan, prepare, share, and, in some cases, move on to action.²⁵ One of the most useful tools a school can develop to identify, evaluate, and address these troubling signs is of a multidisciplinary school threat assessment team (TAT). A TAT with diverse representation often will operate more efficiently and effectively. TAT members should include school principals, counselors, employees, medical and mental health professionals, law enforcement personnel and school resource officers, where applicable.

The TAT serves as a central convening body, so that warning signs observed by multiple people are not considered isolated incidents that slip through the cracks, when they actually may represent escalating behavior that is a serious concern. School districts should keep in mind, however, the importance of relying on factual information (including observed behavior) and avoid unfair labeling or stereotyping of students, to remain in compliance with civil rights and other applicable federal and state laws.

For the purposes of consistency and efficiency, a school TAT should be developed and implemented in coordination with school district policy and practice. In addition, staff already working to identify student needs can be a critical source of information about troubling student behavior for a TAT.

The TAT reviews troubling or threatening behavior of current or former students, parents, school employees or other persons brought to its attention. The TAT contemplates a holistic assessment and management strategy that considers the many aspects of the person's life—academic, residential, work, and social. More than focusing on warning signs or threats alone, the TAT assessment involves a unique overall analysis of changing and relevant behaviors. The TAT takes into consideration, as appropriate, information about classroom behaviors, various kinds of communications, not-yet substantiated information, any threats made, security concerns, parenting issues, or relationship problems that might involve a troubled individual. The TAT may also identify any potential victims with whom the individual may interact. Once the TAT identifies an individual that may pose a threat, the team will identify a course of action for addressing the situation. The appropriate course of action—whether law enforcement intervention, counseling, or other actions—will depend on the specifics of the situation.

Although not as common as in the K–12 environment, TATs are increasingly common in university settings, pushed to the forefront of concern following the 2007 shooting at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Va., where 32 individuals were killed. In some cases, state funding mandates that colleges and universities create threat assessment teams.²⁶

²⁵ See <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/february-2010/threat-assessment-teams>.

²⁶ See *Recommended Practices for Virginia Colleges Threat Assessments at* http://www.threatassessment.vt.edu/resources/tat_info/VArecommended_practices.pdf.

Even in a K–12 setting, where a designated TAT may not have been established, area law enforcement officials can help assess reported threats or troubling behavior, and reach out to available federal resources. The FBI’s behavioral experts in its National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crimes (NCAVC) at Quantico, Va., are available on a 24/7 basis to join in any threat assessment analysis and develop threat mitigation strategies for persons of concern. The law enforcement member of the school TAT should contact the local FBI office for this behavioral analysis assistance.

Each FBI field office has a NCAVC representative available to work with school TATs and coordinate access to the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU), home to the NCAVC. They focus not on how to respond tactically to an *active shooter situation* but rather on how to prevent one. Early intervention can prevent a situation from escalating by identifying, assessing, and managing the threat. The TAT should consult with its district and develop a process to seek these additional resources.

Generally, *active shooter situations* are not motivated by other criminal-related concerns, such as monetary gain or gang affiliation. Often, situations may be prevented by identifying, assessing, and managing potential threats. Recognizing these pre-attack warning signs and indicators might help disrupt a potentially tragic event.

Responding to an Active Shooter Situation

School EOPs should include courses of action that will describe how students and staff can most effectively respond to an *active shooter situation* to minimize the loss of life, and teach and train on these practices, as deemed appropriate by the school.

Law enforcement officers may not be present when a shooting begins. The first law enforcement officers on the scene may arrive after the shooting has ended. Making sure staff know how to respond and instruct their students can help prevent and reduce the loss of life.

No single response fits all *active shooter situations*; however, making sure each individual knows his or her options for response and can react decisively will save valuable time. Depicting scenarios and considering response options in advance will assist individuals and groups in quickly selecting their best course of action.

Understandably, this is a sensitive topic. There is no single answer for what to do, but a survival mindset can increase the odds of surviving. As appropriate for your community, it may be valuable to schedule a time for an open conversation regarding this topic. Though some parents or personnel may find the conversation uncomfortable, they may also find it reassuring to know that, as a whole, their school is thinking about how best to deal with this situation.

During an *active shooter situation*, the natural human reaction, even if you are highly trained, is to be startled, feel fear and anxiety, and even experience initial disbelief and denial. You can expect to hear noise from alarms, gunfire and explosions, and people shouting and screaming. Training provides the means to regain your composure, recall at least some of what you have learned, and commit to action. There are three basic options: run, hide, or fight. You can run away from the shooter, seek a secure place where you can hide and/or deny the shooter access, or incapacitate the shooter to survive and protect others from harm.

As the situation develops, it is possible that students and staff will need to use more than one option. During an *active shooter situation*, staff will rarely have all of the information they need to make a fully informed decision about which option is best. While they should follow the plan and any instructions given during an incident, often they will have to rely on their own judgment to decide which option will best protect lives.²⁷

Respond Immediately

It is not uncommon for people confronted with a threat to first deny the possible danger rather than respond. An investigation by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (2005) into the collapse of the World Trade Center towers on 9/11 found that people close to the floors impacted waited longer to start evacuating than those on unaffected floors.²⁸ Similarly, during the Virginia Tech shooting, individuals on campus responded to the shooting with varying degrees of urgency.²⁹ These studies highlight this delayed response or denial. For example, some people report hearing firecrackers when in fact they heard gunfire.

Train staff to overcome denial and to respond immediately, including fulfilling their responsibilities for individuals in their charge. For example, train staff to recognize the sounds of danger, act, and forcefully communicate the danger and necessary action (e.g., “Gun! Get out!”) to those in their charge. In addition, those closest to the public address or other communications system, or otherwise able to alert others, should communicate the danger and necessary action. Repetition in training and preparedness shortens the time it takes to orient, observe, and act.

Upon recognizing the danger, as soon as it is safe to do so, staff or others must alert responders by contacting 911 with as clear and accurate information as possible.

Run

If it is safe to do so for yourself and those in your care, the first course of action that should be taken is to run out of the building and far away until you are in a safe location.

²⁷ As part of its preparedness mission, *Ready Houston* produces “Run, Hide, Fight” videos, handouts, and trainings to promote preparedness among residents of the Houston region. These materials are not specific to a school setting but may still be helpful. These videos are not recommended for viewing by minors. All of these items are available free of charge, and many are available at <http://www.readyhoustontx.gov/videos.html>.

²⁸ Occupants of both towers delayed initiating their evacuation after World Trade Center 1 was hit. In World Trade Center 1, the median time to initiate evacuation was 3 minutes for occupants from the ground floor to floor 76, and 5 minutes for occupants near the impact region (floors 77 to 91). See National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2005. *Federal Building and Fire Safety Investigation of the World Trade Center Disaster Occupant Behavior, Egress, and Emergency Communications*. Available at <http://www.mingerfoundation.org/downloads/mobility/nist%20world%20trade%20center.pdf>.

²⁹ *Report of the Virginia Tech Review Team*, available at <http://www.governor.virginia.gov/tempContent/techPanelReport-docs/FullReport.pdf> and <http://www.governor.virginia.gov/tempContent/techPanelReport-docs/12%20CHAPTER%20VIII%20MASS%20MURDER%20AT%20NORRIS%20HALL.pdf>.

Students and staff should be trained to

- ❖ Leave personal belongings behind;
- ❖ Visualize possible escape routes, including physically accessible routes for students and staff with disabilities as well as persons with access and functional needs;
- ❖ Avoid escalators and elevators;
- ❖ Take others with them, but not to stay behind because others will not go;
- ❖ Call 911 when safe to do so; and
- ❖ Let a responsible adult know where they are.

Hide

If running is not a safe option, hide in as safe a place as possible.

Students and staff should be trained to hide in a location where the walls might be thicker and have fewer windows. In addition:

- ❖ Lock the doors;
- ❖ Barricade the doors with heavy furniture;
- ❖ Close and lock windows and close blinds or cover windows;
- ❖ Turn off lights;
- ❖ Silence all electronic devices;
- ❖ Remain silent;
- ❖ Hide along the wall closest to the exit but out of the view from the hallway (allowing for an ambush of the shooter and for possible escape if the shooter enters the room);
- ❖ Use strategies to silently communicate with first responders if possible, for example, in rooms with exterior windows make signs to silently signal law enforcement officers and emergency responders to indicate the status of the room's occupants; and
- ❖ Remain in place until given an all clear by identifiable law enforcement officers.

Fight

If neither running nor hiding is a safe option, as a last resort when confronted by the shooter, adults in immediate danger should consider trying to disrupt or incapacitate the shooter by using aggressive force and items in their environment, such as fire extinguishers, and chairs. In a study of 41 *active shooter* events that ended before law enforcement officers arrived, the potential

victims stopped the attacker themselves in 16 instances. In 13 of those cases they physically subdued the attacker.³⁰

While talking to staff about confronting a shooter may be daunting and upsetting for some, they should know that they may be able to successfully take action to save lives. To be clear, confronting an *active shooter* should never be a requirement in any school employee's job description; how each staff member chooses to respond if directly confronted by an *active shooter* is up to him or her. Further, the possibility of an *active shooter* situation is not justification for the presence of firearms on campus in the hands of any personnel other than law enforcement officers.

Interacting With First Responders

Staff should be trained to understand and expect that a law enforcement officer's first priority must be to locate and stop the person(s) believed to be the shooter(s); all other actions are secondary. One comprehensive study determined that more than half of mass-shooting incidents—57 percent—still were under way when the first officer arrived; in 75 percent of those instances that solo officer had to confront the perpetrator to end the threat. In those cases, the officer was shot one-third of the time.³¹

Students and staff should be trained to cooperate and not to interfere with first responders. When law enforcement officer(s) arrives, students and staff must display empty hands with open palms. Law enforcement may instruct everyone to place their hands on their heads, or they may search individuals.

After an *Active Shooter* Incident³²

Once the scene is secured, first responders will work with school officials and victims on a variety of matters. This will include transporting the injured, interviewing witnesses, and initiating the investigation.

The school EOP should identify trained personnel who will provide assistance to victims and their families. This should include establishing an incident response team (including local first responders and other community partners) that is trained to appropriately assess and triage an *active shooter situation* (as well as other emergencies), and provide emergency intervention services and victim assistance beginning immediately after the incident and throughout the recovery efforts. This team will integrate with state and federal resources when an emergency occurs.

Within an ongoing and/or evolving emergency, where the *immediate reunification* of loved ones is *not possible*, providing family members with timely, accurate, and relevant information is paramount. Having family members wait for long periods of time for information about their

³⁰ J. Pete Blair with M. Hunter Martaindale, *United States Active Shooter Events from 2000 to 2010: Training and Equipment Implications*. San Marcos, Texas: Texas State University, 2013. Available at <http://policeforum.org/library/critical-issues-in-policing-series/Blair-UnitedStatesActiveShooterEventsfrom2000to2010Report-Final.pdf>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Also see the “Functional Annexes Content” and “Recovery Annex” sections of this guide.

loved ones not only adds to their stress and frustration but can also escalate the emotions of the entire group. When families are reunited, it is critical that there be child release processes in place to ensure that no child is released to an unauthorized person, even if that person is well-meaning.

Essential steps to help establish trust and provide family members with a sense of control are

- ❖ Identifying a safe location separate from distractions and/or media and the general public, but close enough to allow family members to feel connected in proximity to their children and their loved ones;
- ❖ Scheduling periodic updates even if no additional information is available;
- ❖ being prepared to speak with family members about what to expect when reunified with their child and their loved ones; and
- ❖ Ensuring effective communication with those who have language barriers or need other accommodations, such as sign language interpreters for deaf family members.

When reunification is not possible because a child is missing, injured, or killed, how and when this information is provided to families is critical. Before an emergency, the planning team must determine how, when, and by whom loved ones will be informed if their child or loved one is missing or has been injured or killed. Law enforcement typically takes the lead on death notifications, but all parties must understand their roles and responsibilities. This will ensure that parents and loved ones receive accurate and timely information in a compassionate way.

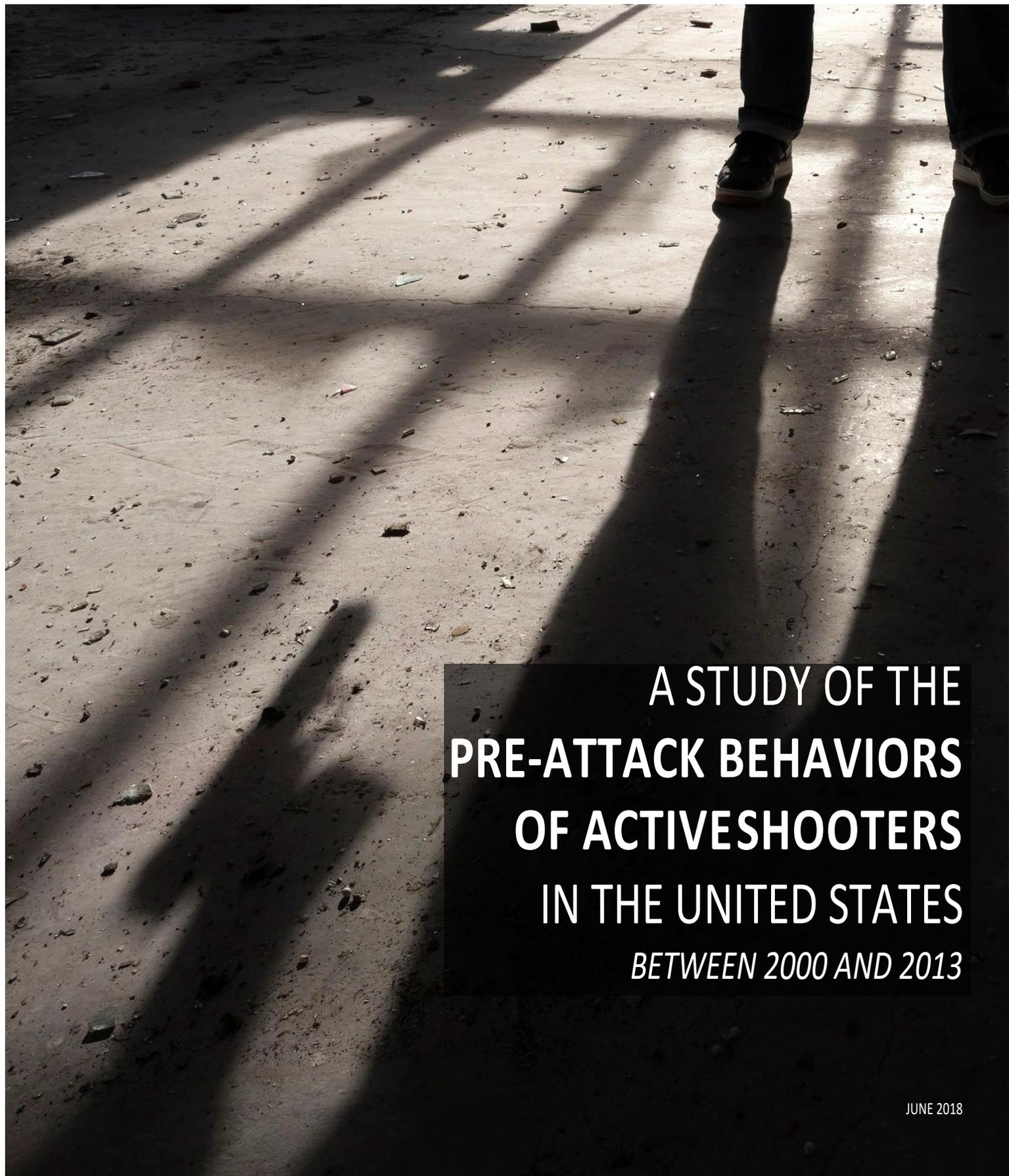
While law enforcement and medical examiner procedures must be followed, families should receive accurate information as soon as possible. Having trained personnel on hand or immediately available to talk to loved ones about death and injury can ensure the notification is provided to family members with clarity and compassion. Counselors should be on hand to immediately assist family members.

The school EOP should include pre-identified points of contact (e.g., counselors, police officers) to work with and support family members. These points of contact should be connected to families as early in the process as possible, including while children are still missing but before any victims have been positively identified. After an incident, it is critical to confirm that each family is getting the support it needs, including over the long-term.

The school EOP should consider printed and age-appropriate resources to help families recognize and seek help with regard to a variety of reactions that they or their loved ones can experience during and after an emergency. Often, a family that has lost a child may have another child or other children in the school. It is critical that these families and loved ones be supported as they both grieve their loss and support their surviving child(ren).

The school EOP also should explicitly address how impacted families and children will be supported if they prefer not to engage with the media. This includes strategies for keeping the media separate from families and students while the emergency is ongoing and support for families that may experience unwanted media attention at their homes.





**A STUDY OF THE
PRE-ATTACK BEHAVIORS
OF ACTIVESHOOTERS
IN THE UNITED STATES**
BETWEEN 2000 AND 2013

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A Study of the Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States

Between 2000 and 2013

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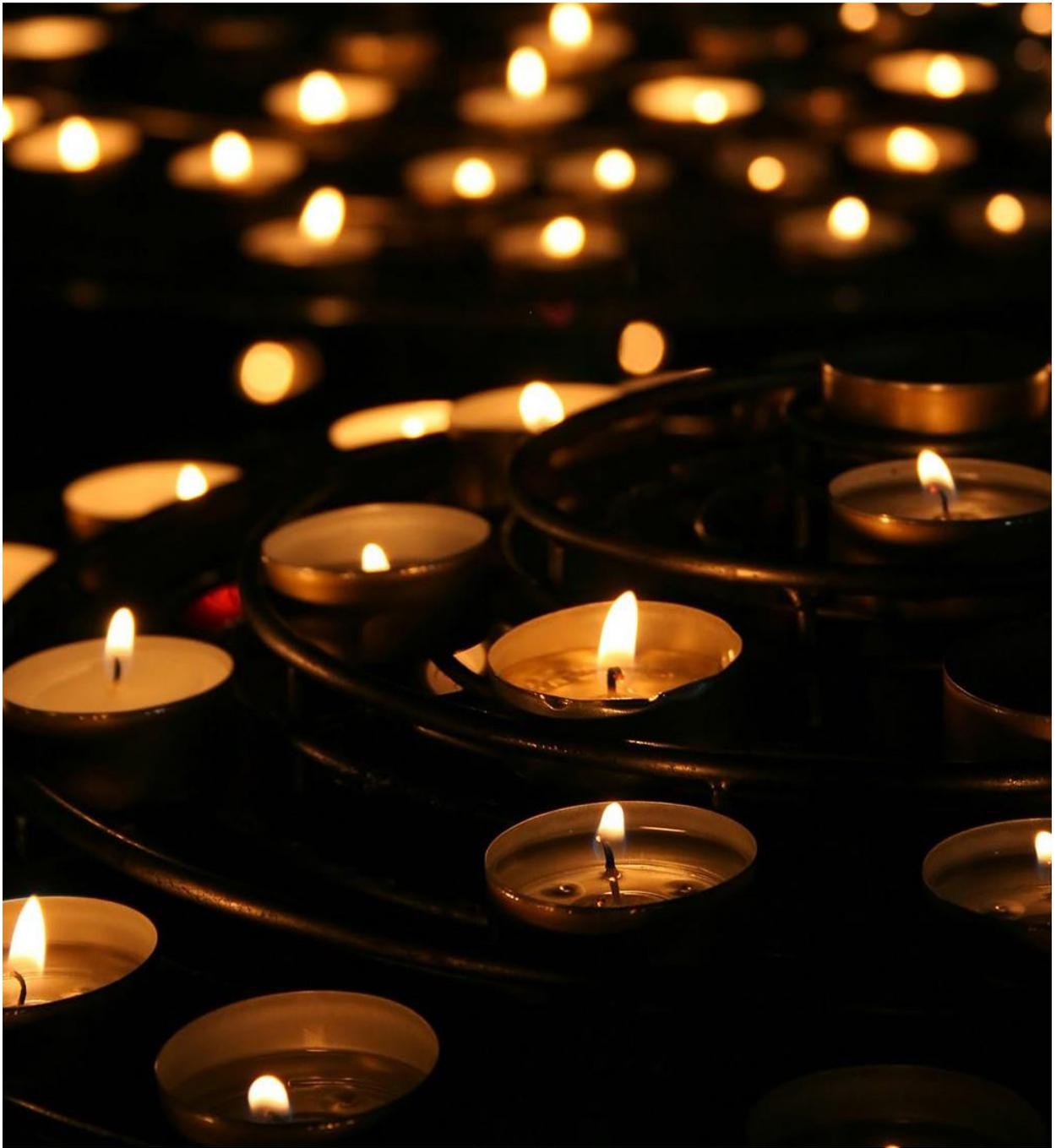
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The authors are exceptionally grateful to our many threat assessment colleagues who have partnered with and supported the BAU over several years. These professionals quietly and tirelessly work each day to prevent active shootings in our schools, universities, houses of worship, and businesses.





The authors and researchers from the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit involved in preparing this report are aware of the horrific impact these shootings have had on victims, survivors, families, and communities. We extend our deepest sympathies to those who have suffered the unimaginable tragedy of an active shooting, either personally or as a family member. We know that behind the statistics and numbers presented here are thousands of individuals with personal stories of grief, bravery, and resilience. In partnership with other law enforcement and threat assessment professionals, we remain committed to doing everything possible to prevent future attacks. Although much work remains, we present this report as a step towards disrupting those who would seek to inflict catastrophic harm.

Introduction

In 2017 there were 30 separate active shootings in the United States, the largest number ever recorded by the FBI during a one-year period.¹ With so many attacks occurring, it can become easy to believe that nothing can stop an active shooter determined to commit violence. “The offender just snapped” and “There’s no way that anyone could have seen this coming” are common reactions that can fuel a collective sense of a “new normal,” one punctuated by a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. Faced with so many tragedies, society routinely wrestles with a fundamental question: can *anything* be done to prevent attacks on our loved ones, our children, our schools, our churches, concerts, and communities?

There is cause for hope because there *is* something that can be done. In the weeks and months before an attack, many active shooters engage in behaviors that may signal impending violence. While some of these behaviors are intentionally concealed, others are observable and — if recognized and reported — may lead to a disruption prior to an attack. Unfortunately, well-meaning bystanders (often friends and family members of the active shooter) may struggle to appropriately categorize the observed behavior as malevolent. They may even resist taking action to report for fear of erroneously labeling a friend or family member as a potential killer. Once reported to law enforcement, those in authority may also struggle to decide how best to assess and intervene, particularly if no crime has yet been committed.

By articulating the concrete, observable pre-attack behaviors of many active shooters, the FBI hopes to make these warning signs more visible and easily identifiable. This information is intended to be used not only by law enforcement officials, mental health care practitioners, and threat assessment professionals, but also by parents, friends, teachers, employers and anyone who suspects that a person is moving towards violence.

In 2014, the FBI published a report titled *A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013*.² One hundred and sixty active shooter incidents in the United States occurring between 2000 and 2013 were included in the sample. In this first report, the FBI focused on the circumstances of the active shooting events (e.g., location, duration, and resolution) but did not attempt to identify the motive driving the offender, nor did it highlight observable pre-attack behaviors demonstrated by the offender. The 2014 report will be referred to as the “Phase I” study.

The present study (“Phase II”) is the natural second phase of that initiative, moving from an examination of the parameters of the shooting events to assessing the pre-attack behaviors of the shooters themselves. This second phase, then, turns from the vitally important inquiry of “what happened during and after the shooting” to the pressing questions of “how do the active shooters behave *before* the attack?” and, if it can be determined, “why did they attack?” The FBI’s objective here was to examine specific behaviors that may precede an attack and which might be useful in identifying, assessing, and managing those who may be on a pathway to deadly violence.

1 <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-us-2016-2017.pdf/view>

2 <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-study-2000-2013-1.pdf/view>

Key Findings of the Phase II Study

1. The **63** active shooters examined in this study did not appear to be uniform in any way such that they could be readily identified prior to attacking *based on demographics alone*.
2. Active shooters take time to plan and prepare for the attack, with **77%** of the subjects spending a week or longer planning their attack and **46%** spending a week or longer actually preparing (procuring the means) for the attack.
3. A majority of active shooters obtained their firearms legally, with only very small percentages obtaining a firearm illegally.
4. The FBI could only verify that **25%** of active shooters in the study had ever been diagnosed with a mental illness. Of those diagnosed, only three had been diagnosed with a psychotic disorder.
5. Active shooters were typically experiencing multiple stressors (an average of **3.6** separate stressors) in the year before they attacked.
6. On average, each active shooter displayed **4 to 5** concerning behaviors over time that were observable to others around the shooter. The most frequently occurring concerning behaviors were related to the active shooter's mental health, problematic interpersonal interactions, and leakage of violent intent.
7. For active shooters under age 18, school peers and teachers were more likely to observe concerning behaviors than family members. For active shooters 18 years old and over, spouses/domestic partners were the most likely to observe concerning behaviors.
8. When concerning behavior was observed by others, the most common response was to communicate directly to the active shooter (**83%**) or do nothing (**54%**). In **41%** of the cases the concerning behavior was reported to law enforcement. Therefore, just because concerning behavior was *recognized* does not necessarily mean that it was *reported* to law enforcement.
9. In those cases where the active shooter's primary grievance could be identified, the most common grievances were related to an adverse interpersonal or employment action against the shooter (**49%**).
10. In the majority of cases (**64%**) at least one of the victims was specifically targeted by the active shooter.

*All percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Methodology

With the goal of carefully reviewing the pre-attack lives and behaviors of the active shooters, the FBI developed a unique protocol of 104 variables covering, among other things:

- Demographics
- Planning and preparation
- Acquisition of firearms in relation to the attack
- Stressors
- Grievance formation
- Concerning pre-attack behaviors and communications
- Targeting decisions
- Mental health

Whereas Phase I analyzed event circumstances that are typically well documented both in law enforcement incident reports and reliable open sources³, this second phase is substantially based on observations of what are often nuanced behavioral indicators demonstrated by the active shooter prior to the attack. Given the subtle nature of many of the factors relevant to the inquiry, the FBI decided to use data that have been verified to the greatest possible extent, relying almost exclusively on information contained in official law enforcement investigative files.⁴ For this reason, Phase II includes only those cases where the FBI obtained law enforcement investigative files that contained “background” materials (e.g., interviews with family members, acquaintances, neighbors; school or employment records; writings generated by the subject) adequate to answer the protocol questions.⁵ In addition, as Phase II focused on identifying pre-attack behaviors of those on a trajectory to violence, active shooting events which appeared to be spontaneous reactions to situational factors (e.g., fights that escalated) were excluded. This resulted in a final sample of 63 active shooting incidents included in the Phase II study.

The use of law enforcement investigative case files as the primary source of data makes this study unique in comparison to other reports that typically rely upon unverified data derived from open sources. The comprehensive evaluation of law enforcement case files for suitability and completeness also contributed to the substantial time it has taken to prepare and publish this study.

The FBI examined whether the 63 cases included in Phase II are representative of the entire Phase I sample ($N = 160$). To identify the differences in the samples between Phase I and Phase II ($N = 160$ versus $N = 63$), the FBI compared those cases that were *only* in Phase I ($n = 97$) to those cases included in Phase II ($N = 63$), assessing potential differences between the active shooters (e.g., race, gender, age, and whether the offender committed suicide subsequent to the attack), as well as potential differences in the characteristics of the incidents (number of victims killed, number of law enforcement officers killed, location of the incident, active shooter movement during the event, and if the event concluded prior to the arrival of law enforcement).

³ Incident overview (e.g., date, location), incident specifics (weapon(s) used, duration of event), and incident outcome (deaths, injuries, resolution).

⁴ For one incident, the study relied on publicly available official reports which were based on the complete law enforcement investigative files.

⁵ The investigative files did not contain uniform amounts of subject-related behavioral information, as the depth and breadth of investigations varied based on several factors, including available resources, the prospect or not of trial, and the complexity of the event.

As compared to the 97 cases that were only in Phase I, the 63 cases in Phase II had the following characteristics:

- Had a higher number of victims killed on average during each shooting;
- Were more likely to end before law enforcement arrived;
- Were more likely to include offenders who identified with Asian and Caucasian ethnicity, with active shooters identified with African American and Hispanic ethnicity generally underrepresented as compared to Phase I;
- Were more likely to occur in an educational facility or a house of worship; and
- Were more likely to end with the active shooter committing suicide.

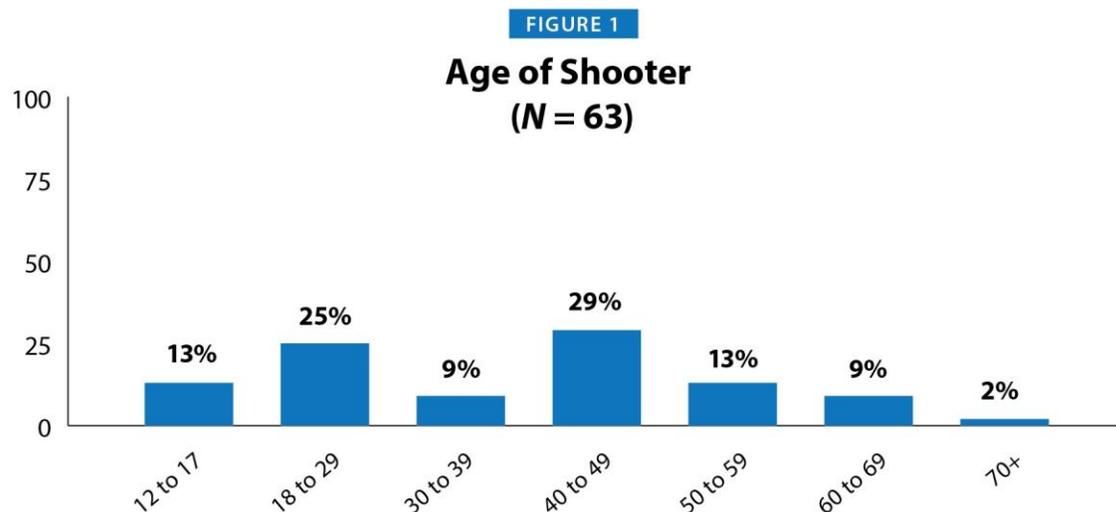
After cases were identified, a three-stage coding process was utilized. First, two researchers read all case materials and independently coded each of the cases across all protocol variables. The researchers took a conservative approach to coding, declining to definitively answer any question that was not supported by record evidence. Second, another experienced coder (the “reviewer”) also read each investigative file. In the final stage, the coders and the reviewer met for each of the 63 cases, compared answers, discussed disagreements, and produced a single reconciled set of data.

SHOOTER DEMOGRAPHICS

The sample comprised individuals who varied widely along a range of demographic factors making it impossible to create a demographic profile of an active shooter. Indeed, the findings and conclusions of this study should be considered in light of the reality that these 63 active shooters did not appear to be uniform in any way such that they could be readily identified prior to attacking *based on demographics alone*.

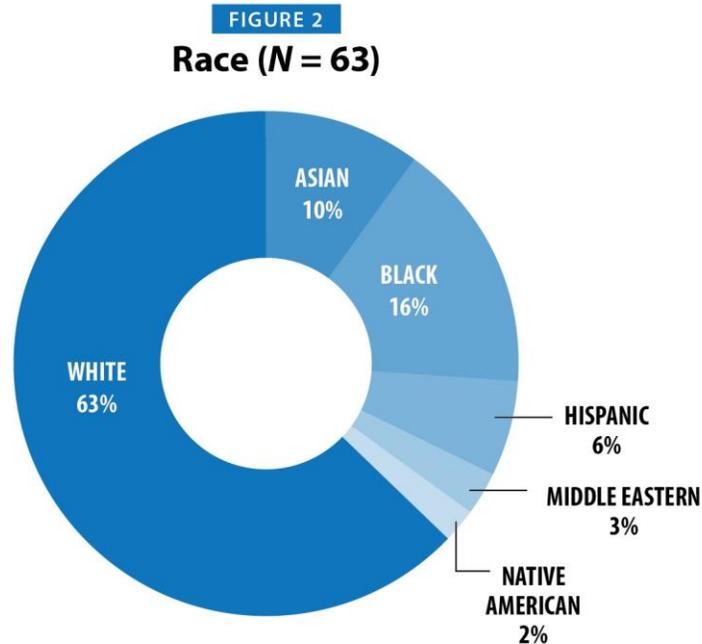
Age:

The youngest active shooter was 12 years old and the oldest was 88 years old with an average age of 37.8 years. Grouping the active shooters by age revealed the following:



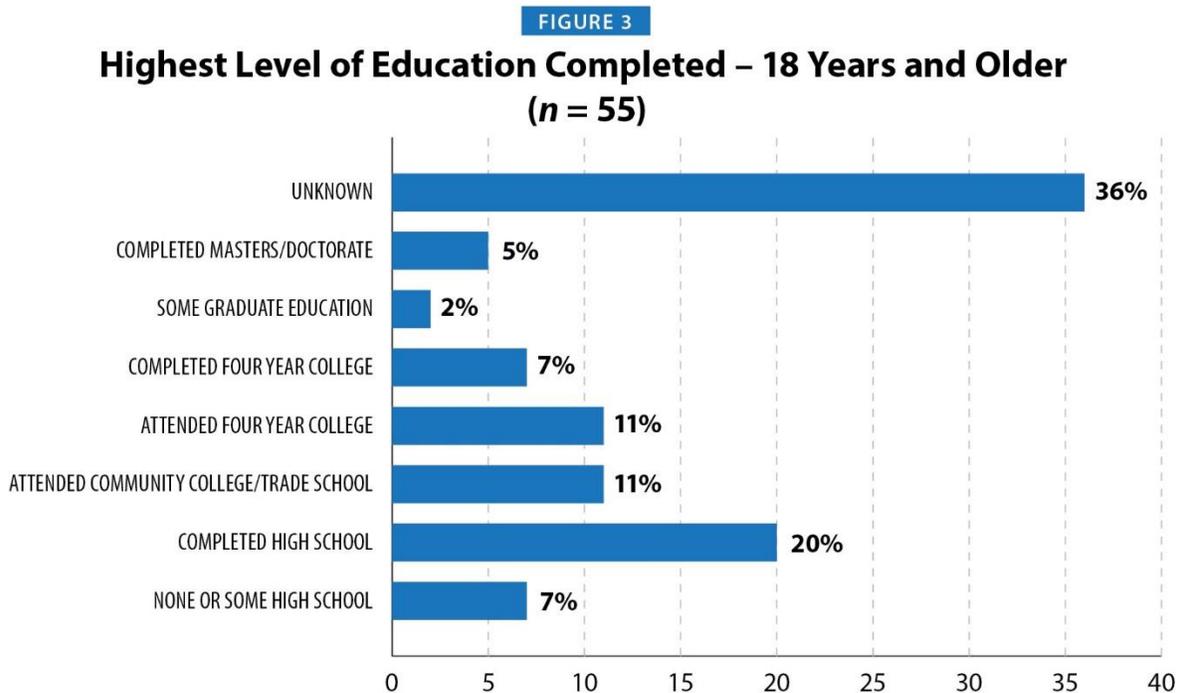
Gender and Race:

The sample was overwhelmingly male (94%, $n = 59$), with only four females in the data set (6%, $n = 4$), and varied by race as shown in Figure 2:⁶



Highest Level of Education⁷:

None of the active shooters under the age of 18 had successfully completed high school, and one (age 12) had not yet entered high school. When known, the highest level of education of adults varied considerably, as shown in Figure 3:



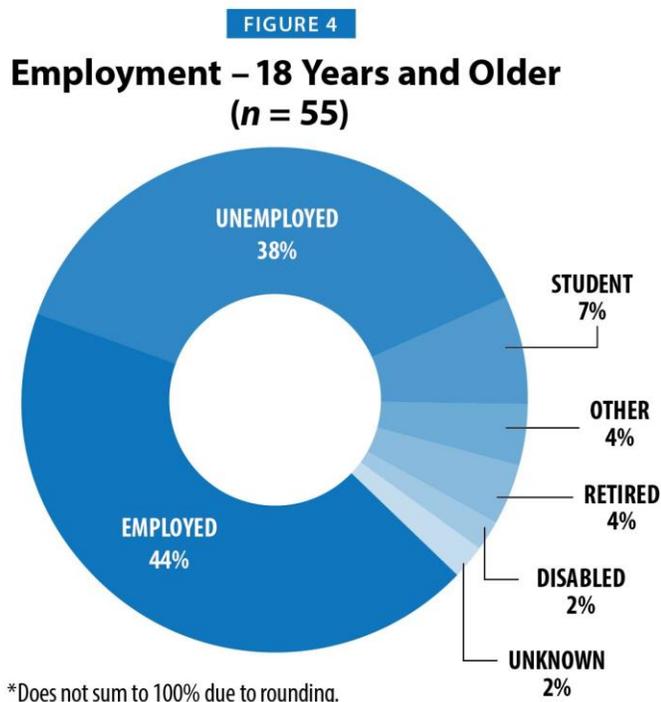
*Does not sum to 100% due to rounding.

6 Descriptors of active shooters' races were obtained from law enforcement records.

7 Active shooters under the age of 18 ($n=8$) were excluded in analyses for those variables not typically pertaining to juveniles (e.g., marital status, higher education).

Employment:

The active shooters who were under 18 years old were all students. As featured in Figure 4, nearly equal percentages of the adult active shooters 18 years or older were employed as were unemployed, and 7% ($n = 4$) were primarily students. The rest of the adults were categorized as retired, disabled/receiving benefits, or other/unknown.



Military:

Of the active shooters 18 and older, 24% ($n = 13$) had at least some military experience, with six having served in the Army, three in the Marines, two in the Navy, and one each in the Air Force and the Coast Guard.

Relationship Status:

The active shooters included in the Phase II study were mostly single at the time of the offense (57%, $n = 36$). Thirteen percent ($n = 8$) were married, while another 13% were divorced. The remaining 11% were either partnered but not married ($n = 7$) or separated (6%, $n = 4$).

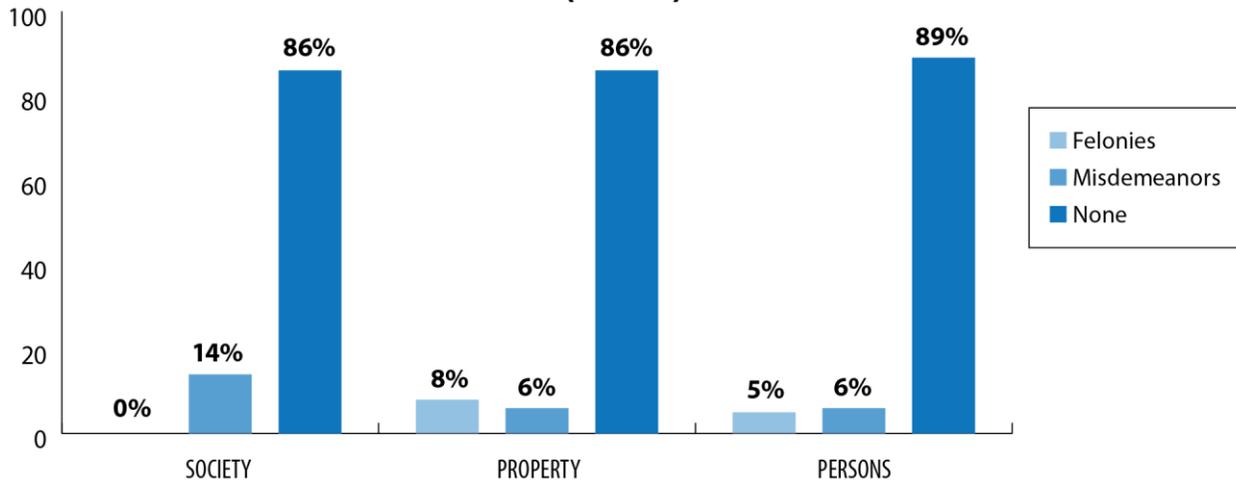
Criminal Convictions and Anti-Social Behavior⁸:

Nineteen of the active shooters aged 18 and over (35%) had adult convictions prior to the active shooting event. As visualized in Figure 5, the convictions can be categorized as crimes against society, property, or persons. The category of “crimes against society” included offenses such as driving under the influence, disorderly conduct and the possession of drug paraphernalia. Both the misdemeanor and felony “crimes against property” involved non-violent offenses, such as conspiracy to commit theft, theft, possession of stolen property, and criminal mischief. The misdemeanor “crimes against persons” were not inherently dangerous, but the felony “crimes against persons” involved convictions for criminal sexual assault of a family member, aggravated stalking, and endangering a person (although no active shooter was convicted of more than one crime against a person).

⁸ The study does not include juvenile adjudications; therefore, we did not run the analyses on those aged 17 and younger.

FIGURE 5

**Adult Criminal Convictions – 18 Years and Older
(n = 55)**



*There was only one case where an active shooter had both a felony and a misdemeanor conviction in a single category (under "Property").

In sum, the active shooters had a limited history of adult convictions for violent crime and a limited history of adult convictions for crime of any kind.

Because formal criminal proceedings may not capture the full range of anti-social behaviors in a person’s background, the FBI also looked for evidence of behaviors that were abusive and/or violent, but which did not result in a criminal charge. For some active shooters, no evidence of these behaviors was found, but given that these actions by definition did not involve the formal criminal justice system, it is possible that more violent incidents occurred than are reported here.

We found evidence that 62% (n = 39) of the active shooters had a history of acting in an abusive, harassing, or oppressive way (e.g., excessive bullying, workplace intimidation); 16% (n = 10) had engaged in intimate partner violence; and 11% (n = 7) had engaged in stalking-related conduct.⁹

Considerations

There were very few demographic patterns or trends (aside from gender) that could be identified, reinforcing the concept that there is no one “profile” of an active shooter. Perhaps most noteworthy is the absence of a pronounced violent criminal history in an overwhelming majority of the adult active shooters. Law enforcement and threat management professionals assessing a potentially violent person may therefore wish to avoid any reliance on demographic characteristics or on evidence (or lack thereof) of prior criminal behavior in conducting their assessments.

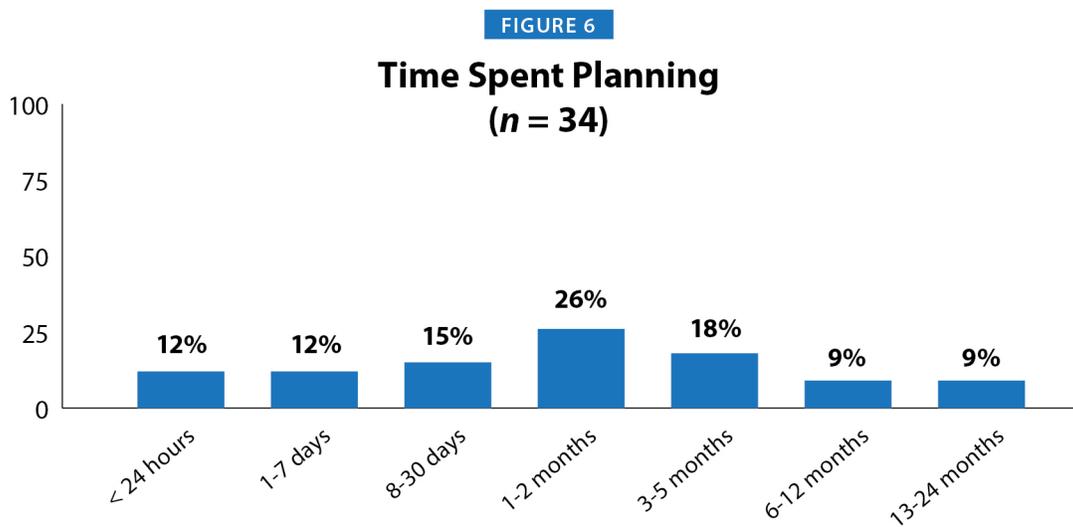
⁹ This number may be underrepresented given the high percentage of unknown responses as related to stalking behaviors (68%).

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

This study examined two related but separate temporal aspects of the active shooters' pre-attack lives — total time spent *planning* the attack and total time spent *preparing* for the attack.^{10,11,12} The purpose in analyzing these chronologies was to establish the broad parameters during which active shooters were moving toward the attack and to identify behaviors that may have been common during these time periods.

In this context, planning means the full range of considerations involved in carrying out a shooting attack. This includes the decision to engage in violence, selecting specific or random targets, conducting surveillance, and addressing all ancillary practical issues such as victim schedules, transportation, and site access. Planning is more specific than a general intent to act violently and involves the thought processes necessary to bring about an intended outcome. Since planning may primarily be an internal thought process, it was often difficult to find objective, observable indications of an active shooter's planning. In nearly half of the cases, the total time spent planning is unknown. However, this is different than declaring that there was no evidence of planning at all, because in every case there was at least some evidence that the active shooter planned the attack; the challenge was ascertaining when the planning began.

In establishing the total duration of planning, the FBI looked for evidence of behaviors that were observable (e.g., conversations, conducting surveillance) as well as in materials that were private to the active shooter (e.g., journals, computer hard drives) and likely unknowable to others until after the attack. As demonstrated in Figure 6, there was a wide range of planning duration in the 34 cases where the time spent planning could reasonably be determined.



*Does not sum to 100% due to rounding.

With regard to specific planning activities, care should be taken in the interpretation of the data. For instance, our study indicates that few active shooters overall approached or conducted surveillance on their target (14%, $n = 9$), and fewer still researched or studied the target site where the attack occurred (10%, $n = 6$). While this could indicate that the active shooters were uninterested in knowing about their targets or attack sites in advance or engaged in little tactical planning, this is inconsistent with the operational experience of the FBI. The likely reason for this finding is that the active shooters often attacked people and places with which they were already familiar. There was

10 Calhoun, T., & Weston, S., (2003). Contemporary threat management. San Diego: Specialized Training Services;

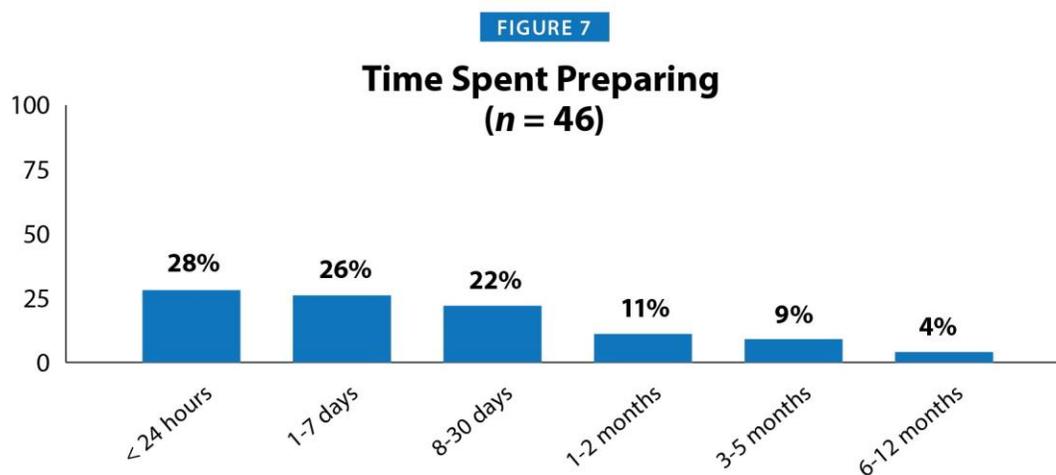
11 Fein, R. & Vossekuil, B. (1999). Assassination in the United States: an operational study of recent assassins, attackers, and near-lethal approachers. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*.

12 Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2004). *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 the U.S. Department of Education.

a known connection between the active shooters and the attack site in the majority of cases (73%, $n = 46$), often a workplace or former workplace for those 18 and older (35%, $n = 19$), and almost always a school or former school for those younger than 18 (88%, $n = 7$), indicating that in most cases the active shooter was already familiar with both the attack site as well as the persons located at the site. Conversely, those active shooters with no affiliation to the targeted site behaved differently. Active shooters with no known connection to the site of their attack were more likely to conduct surveillance ($p < .05$) and research the site ($p < .01$). With routine contact, pre-attack surveillance could presumably be conducted concurrent to normalized activity and eliminate the need for a more formalized or detectable reconnaissance of a chosen target.

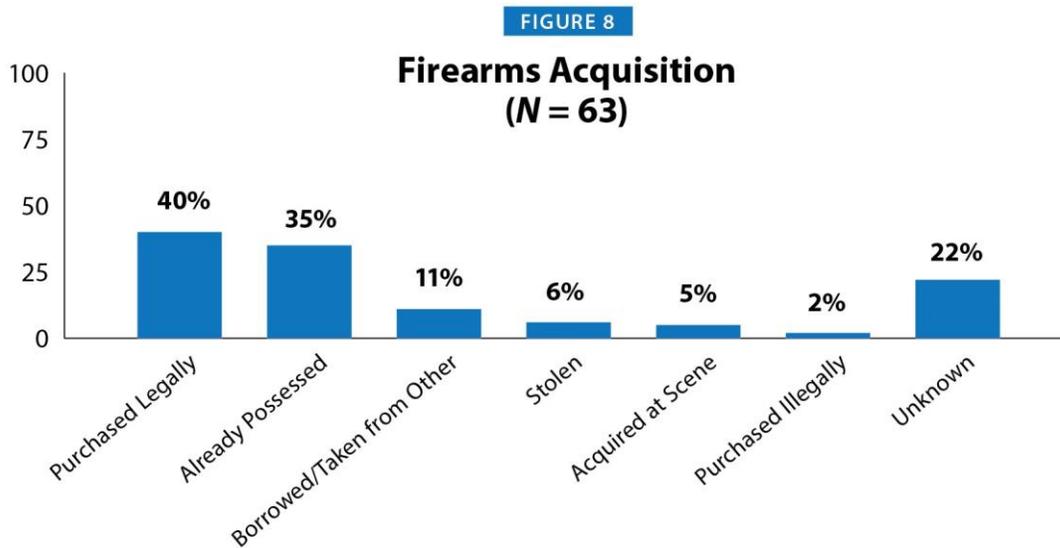
The investigative files also demonstrated that only some active shooters researched or studied past attacks by others (21%, $n = 13$). This is not to say that other active shooters were unaware of past attacks — it is difficult to imagine that they did not have at least some basic knowledge of prior infamous shootings that received national media coverage. The FBI again suspects that this behavior may be underrepresented in the study sample, especially as we could not determine if active shooters researched past attacks in 46% of the cases.

Preparing was narrowly defined for this story as actions taken to procure the means for the attack, typically items such as a handgun or rifle, ammunition, special clothing and/or body armor. The focus was on activities that could have been noticed by others (e.g., a visit to a gun store, the delivery of ammunition) and which were essential to the execution of the plan. The FBI was able to find evidence of time spent preparing in more cases than for time spent planning (likely reflecting the overt nature of procuring materials as opposed to the presumably largely internal thought process of planning). As Figure 7 demonstrates, in more than half of the cases where the time spent preparing was known, active shooters spent one week or less preparing for the attack.



FIREARMS ACQUISITION

As part of the review of the active shooter’s preparations, the FBI explored investigative records and attempted to identify how each active shooter obtained the firearm(s) used during the attack. Most commonly (40%, $n = 25$), the active shooter purchased a firearm or firearms legally and specifically for the purpose of perpetrating the attack. A very small percentage purchased firearms illegally (2%, $n = 1$) or stole the firearm (6%, $n = 4$). Some (11%, $n = 7$) borrowed or took the firearm from a person known to them. A significant number of active shooters (35%, $n = 22$) already possessed a firearm and did not appear (based on longevity of possession) to have obtained it for the express purpose of committing the shooting.



*Data percentages detailed above add to greater than 100% as active shooters could have obtained multiple firearms in different ways.

Considerations

Active shooters generally take some time to plan and carry out the attack. However, retrospectively determining the exact moment when an active shooter decided to engage in violence is a challenging and imprecise process. In reviewing indicators of planning and preparing, the FBI notes that most active shooters (who demonstrated evidence of these processes in an observable manner) spent days, weeks, and sometimes months getting ready to attack. In fact, in those cases where it could be determined, 77% of the active shooters ($n = 26$) spent a week or longer planning their attack, and 46% ($n = 21$) spent a week or longer preparing. Readers are cautioned that simply because some active shooters spent less than 24 hours planning and preparing, this should not suggest that potential warning signs or evidence of an escalating grievance did not exist before the initiation of these behaviors. In the four cases where active shooters took less than 24 hours to plan and prepare for their attacks, all had at least one concerning behavior and three had an identifiable grievance.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, active shooters tended to attack places already familiar to them, likely as a result of a personal grievance which motivated the attack and/or as a result of operational comfort and access. A unique challenge for safety, threat assessment, and security professionals will be to identify “outside” active shooters who are not already operating within the target environment. Pre-attack site surveillance by an outsider may be one observable behavior in physical or online worlds indicative of planning and preparation activities.

STRESSORS

Stressors are physical, psychological, or social forces that place real or perceived demands/pressures on an individual and which may cause psychological and/or physical distress. Stress is considered to be a well-established correlate of criminal behavior.¹³ For this study, a wide variety of potential stressors were assessed, including financial pressures, physical health concerns, interpersonal conflicts with family, friends, and colleagues (work and/or school), mental health issues, criminal and civil law issues, and substance abuse.¹⁴

¹³ Felson, R.B., Osgood, D.W., Horney, J. & Wiernik, C. (2012). Having a bad month: General versus specific effects of stress on crime. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 28, 347-363 for a discussion of various theories describing the relationship between stress and crime.

¹⁴ See Appendix A.

The FBI recognizes that most (if not all) people in some way confront similar issues on a regular basis in their daily lives, and that most possess adequate personal resources, psychological resiliency, and coping skills to successfully navigate such challenges without resorting to violence. Therefore, the FBI focused on identifying stressors that appeared to have more than a minimal amount of adverse impact on that individual, and which were sufficiently significant to have been memorialized, shared, or otherwise noted in some way (e.g., in the active shooter’s own writings, in conversation with family or friends, work files, court records). Given the fluid nature of some (although not all) of the stressors, the analysis was limited to the year preceding the attack.

The variables were treated as binary, that is, either the stressor was present or not, without regard for the number of separate circumstances giving rise to the stressor. So, an active shooter who had conflict with *one* family member and a shooter who had conflicts with *several* family members were both coded as “yes” for “conflict with other family members.”

Overall, the data reflects that active shooters were typically experiencing multiple stressors (an average of 3.6 separate stressors) in the year before they attacked. For example, in the year before his attack, one active shooter was facing disciplinary action at school for abuse of a teacher, was himself abused and neglected at home, and had significant conflict with his peers. Another active shooter was under six separate stressors, including a recent arrest for drunk driving, accumulating significant debt, facing eviction, showing signs of both depression and anxiety, and experiencing both the criminal and civil law repercussions of an incident three months before the attack where he barricaded himself in a hotel room and the police were called.

The only stressor that applied to more than half the sample was mental health (62%, $n = 39$). Other stressors that were present in at least 20% of the sample were related to financial strain, employment, conflicts with friends and peers, marital problems, drug and alcohol abuse, other, conflict at school, and physical injury.

TABLE 1: STRESSORS

Stressors	Number	%
Mental health	39	62
Financial strain	31	49
Job related	22	35
Conflicts with friends/peers	18	29
Marital problems	17	27
Abuse of illicit drugs/alcohol	14	22
Other (e.g. caregiving responsibilities)	14	22
Conflict at school	14	22
Physical injury	13	21
Conflict with parents	11	18
Conflict with other family members	10	16
Sexual stress/frustration	8	13
Criminal problems	7	11
Civil problems	6	10
Death of friend/relative	4	6
None	1	2

MENTAL HEALTH

There are important and complex considerations regarding mental health, both because it is the most prevalent stressor and because of the common but erroneous inclination to assume that anyone who commits an active shooting must de facto be mentally ill. First, the *stressor* “mental health” is not synonymous with a *diagnosis* of mental illness. The stressor “mental health” indicates that the active shooter appeared to be struggling with (most commonly) depression, anxiety, paranoia, etc. in their daily life in the year before the attack. There may be complex interactions with other stressors that give rise to what may ultimately be transient manifestations of behaviors and moods that would not be sufficient to warrant a formal diagnosis of mental illness. In this context, it is exceedingly important to highlight that the FBI could only verify that 25% ($n = 16$) of the active shooters in Phase II were known to have been diagnosed by a mental health professional with a mental illness *of any kind* prior to the offense.¹⁵ The FBI could not determine if a diagnosis had been given in 37% ($n = 23$) of cases.

Of the 16 cases where a diagnosis prior to the incident could be ascertained, 12 active shooters had a mood disorder; four were diagnosed with an anxiety disorder; three were diagnosed with a psychotic disorder; and two were diagnosed with a personality disorder. Finally, one active shooter was diagnosed with Autism spectrum disorder; one with a developmental disorder; and one was described as “other.” Having a diagnosed mental illness was unsurprisingly related to a higher incidence of concurrent mental health stressors among active shooters.

Considerations

It is clear that a majority of active shooters experienced multiple stressors in their lives before the attack. While the active shooters’ reactions to stressors were not measured by the FBI, what appears to be noteworthy and of importance to threat assessment professionals is the active shooters’ ability to navigate conflict and resiliency (or lack thereof) in the face of challenges. Given the high prevalence of financial and job-related stressors as well as conflict with peers and partners, those in contact with a person of concern at his/her place of employment may have unique insights to inform a threat assessment.

In light of the very high lifetime prevalence of the symptoms of mental illness among the U.S. population, formally diagnosed mental illness is not a very specific predictor of violence of any type, let alone targeted violence.^{16,17,18} Some studies indicate that nearly half of the U.S. population experiences symptoms of mental illness over their lifetime, with population estimates of the lifetime prevalence of diagnosable mental illness among U.S. adults at 46%, with 9% meeting the criteria for a personality disorder.^{19,20} Therefore, absent specific evidence, careful consideration should be given to social and contextual factors that might interact with any mental health issue before concluding that an active shooting was “caused” by mental illness. In short, declarations that all active shooters must simply be mentally ill are misleading and unhelpful.

CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

Concerning behaviors are *observable* behaviors exhibited by the active shooter. For this study, a wide variety of concerning behaviors were considered, including those related to potential symptoms of a mental health disorder, interpersonal interactions, quality of the active shooter’s thinking or communication, recklessness, violent media usage, changes in hygiene and weight, impulsivity, firearm behavior, and physical aggression.²¹ Although these may be related to stressors in the active shooter’s life, the focus here was not on the internal, subjective experience of

15 The number of documented, diagnosed mental illness may be the result of a number of factors, including those related to situational factors (access to health care) as well as those related to the study factors (access to mental health records).

16 Elbogen, E.B., & Johnson, S.C. (2009). The intricate link between violence and mental disorder. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, 66(2), 152-161.

17 Glied, S.A., and Frank, R.G. (2014). Mental illness and violence: Lessons from the evidence. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104, e5-e6 doi:10.2195/AJPH.2013.301710

18 Monahan, J., Steadman, H. J., Silver, E., Applebaum, P.S., Clark Robbins, P., Mulvey, E. P., & Banks, S. (2001). *Rethinking Risk Assessment: The MacArthur Study of Mental Disorder and Violence*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

19 Kessler, R.C., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K.R., Walters, E.E. Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, 2005;62(6): 593-602.

20 Lenzweger, M.F., Lane, M.C., Loranger, A.W., Kessler, R.C., DSM-IV personality disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Biol Psychiatry*. 2007;62(6): 553-564.

21 See Appendix B.

the active shooter, but rather on what was *objectively knowable* to others. So, while the assessment of stressors is meant to provide insight into the active shooter’s inner turmoil, the examination of concerning behaviors addresses a related but separate issue — the possibility of identifying active shooters before they attack by being alert for observable, concerning behaviors. The FBI looked for documented confirmation that someone noticed a facet of the shooter’s behavior causing the person to feel a “more than minimal” degree of unease about the well-being and safety of those around the active shooter.

Before examining what behaviors were observable by others, it is useful to address the widespread perception that active shooters tend to be cut off from those around them. In general, the active shooters in Phase II were not completely isolated and had at least some social connection to another person. While most of the active shooters age 18 and older were single/never married (51%, *n* = 28) or separated/divorced (22%, *n* = 12) at the time of the attack, the majority did live with someone else (68%, *n* = 43). This percentage was slightly less (64%, *n* = 35) for only those active shooters who were 18 years or older. Most had significant in-person social interactions with at least one other person in the year before the attack (86%, *n* = 54), and more than a quarter of them had significant online interactions with another person within a year of the attack (27%, *n* = 17). All active shooters either: a) lived with someone, or b) had significant in-person or online social interactions.

Since the observation of concerning behaviors offers the opportunity for intervention prior to the attack, this study examines not only what was observed, but when the observations were made, who made them, and what if anything the person(s) did with regard to these observations. To better serve threat assessment teams, mental health professionals, community resources, and law enforcement officials, the FBI expanded the inquiry to capture behaviors that may have been observed at any point (in many cases beyond one year) before the attack.

Overall, active shooters showed concerning behaviors in multiple ways, with an average of 4.7 concerning behaviors per active shooter. Behaviors observed in more than half of the sample were related to the shooter’s mental health²², interpersonal interactions, leakage (the communication to a third-party of an intent to harm someone, discussed with threats in a separate section), and the quality of the active shooter’s thinking or communication.

Of note was that contextually inappropriate firearms behavior was noted in approximately one fifth of the active shooters, while drug and alcohol abuse figured even less prominently in the sample (for the purposes of the study, contextually inappropriate firearms behavior was defined as interest in or use of firearms that appeared unusual given the active shooter’s background and experience with firearms).

TABLE 2: CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

Concerning Behavior	Number	%
Mental health	39	62
Interpersonal interactions	36	57
Leakage	35	56
Quality of thinking or communication	34	54
Work performance*	11	46
School performance**	5	42
Threats/confrontations	22	35
Anger	21	33
Physical aggression	21	33

Continues on next page

22 Thirty-nine active shooters were experiencing a mental health stressor, and 39 active shooters showed concerning behaviors related to mental health, but the same 39 active shooters did not appear in each category; there were five active shooters who had a mental health stressor but who did not show a concerning behavior, and five other active shooters who showed a mental health-related concerning behavior but for whom there was no evidence of mental health stress.

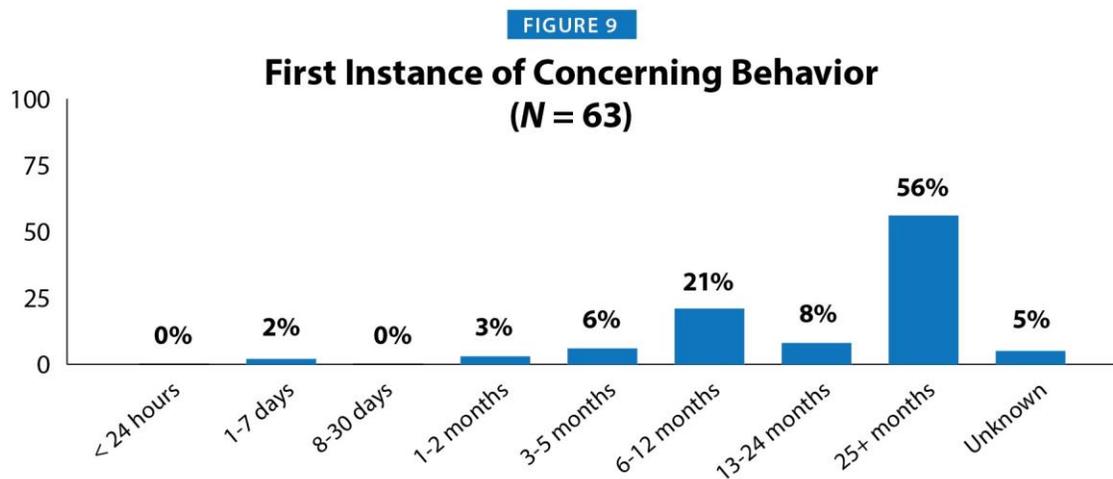
Risk-taking	13	21
Firearm behavior	13	21
Violent media usage	12	19
Weight/eating	8	13
Drug abuse	8	13
Impulsivity	7	11
Alcohol abuse	6	10
Physical health	6	10
Other (e.g. idolizing criminals)	5	8
Sexual behavior	4	6
Quality of sleep	3	5
Hygiene/appearance	2	3

* Based on the 24 active shooters who were employed at the time of the offense

** Based on the 12 active shooters who were students at the time of the offense

When Were the Concerning Behaviors Noticed?

Since the overwhelming majority of active shooters (all but three) displayed at least two concerning behaviors, there are a number of different ways to assess the data. One way is to examine the data by active shooter and to observe the first instance that any concerning behavior was noticed (this could not be determined for three active shooters). Figure 9 shows this data and helps frame the longest time before a shooting during which others were concerned about the active shooter's behavior.



*Does not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Again, this chart shows the first instance of *any* concerning behavior, and it should be kept in mind that this behavior might not have been the type that by *itself* would cause a reasonable person to be alarmed or to report it to others. For example, a co-worker who noticed that an active shooter had more than the normal amount of conflict with a supervisor might be unlikely to take any action. Perhaps only after an attack and with the benefit of hindsight would this singular behavior be considered to be — in and of itself — troubling or concerning. Yet, on average, each active shooter displayed *four to five* concerning behaviors over time. While it may only be the interaction and cumulative effect of these behaviors that would cause alarm, early recognition and detection of growing or interrelated problems may help to mitigate the potential for violence.

In What Way Were the Concerning Behaviors Noticed?

Concerning behaviors came to the attention to others in a variety of ways, with some far more common than others. The most prevalent way in which concerning behaviors were noticed was verbal communication by the active shooter (95%, $n = 60$), followed by observing the physical actions of the active shooter (86%, $n = 54$), written communication (27%, $n = 17$), and finally instances where concerning behavior was displayed online (16%, $n = 10$). A large majority of active shooters (89%, $n = 56$) demonstrated concerning behaviors that were noticed in multiple ways.

Who Noticed the Concerning Behaviors?

At least one person noticed a concerning behavior in every active shooter's life, and on average, people from three different groups noticed concerning behaviors for each active shooter. As shown below, classmates (for those who were students), partners (for those in relationships), family members and friends most frequently noticed concerning behavior, followed by co-workers, other, and law enforcement:

TABLE 3: WHO NOTICED CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

Who Noticed	Number	%
Schoolmate*	11	92
Spouse/domestic partner**	13	87
Teacher/school staff*	9	75
Family member	43	68
Friend	32	51
Co-worker	25	40
Other (e.g. neighbors)	23	37
Law enforcement	16	25
Online individual	6	10
Religious mentor	3	5

* Percentage calculated only with those active shooters who were students at the time of the offense

** Percentage calculated only with those active shooters who were in a relationship at the time of the offense

What, If Anything, Did the Concerned Party Do?

If the person recognizes behaviors as problematic but takes no action, the opportunity for intervention is missed. Whether and how a person responds to an active shooter's concerning behavior is likely influenced by a host of personal and situational factors (e.g., whether the behavior is threatening to the observer or others, the relationship of the observer and active shooter, avenues for anonymous reporting, and/or confidence in authorities or others to address the behavior).

In this study, even in cases where an active shooter displayed a variety of concerning behaviors that might indicate an intent to act violently, the observer(s) of that information did not necessarily pass it along to anyone else. As shown above, the people most likely to notice concerning behaviors were those who knew the active shooter best — family, friends and classmates. For the very reason they are the people most likely to take note of concerning behaviors, they are also people who may feel constrained from acting on these concerns because of loyalty, disbelief, and/or fear of the consequences.²³

23 Borum, R. (2013). Informing Lone-Offender Investigations. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 12(1), 103-112.

Again, keeping in mind that active shooters displayed multiple concerning behaviors and those who observed these behaviors might have responded in different ways to each, the most common response was to communicate directly to the active shooter (83%, $n = 52$) or do nothing (54%, $n = 34$). Thus, in many instances, the concern stayed between the person who noticed the behavior and the active shooter.

The next most common responses were: report the active shooter to a non-law enforcement authority (51%, $n = 32$); discuss the concerning behavior with a friend or family member (49%, $n = 31$); and, report the active shooter to law enforcement authority (41%, $n = 26$).

Considerations

The analysis above is not intended to, nor could it, encompass the innumerable ways in which the observer of a concerning behavior might react. Nor does it suggest that every concerning behavior warrants assertive intervention; many of the concerning behaviors that registered with others likely would not have presaged deadly violence to a reasonable person. The FBI is aware that in retrospect certain facts may take on a heightened degree of significance that may not have been clear at the time.

Nevertheless, understanding that there are often opportunities before a shooting to recognize concerning behaviors that may suggest progression toward violence, the FBI is highlighting the most common behaviors displayed in the sample. There is no single warning sign, checklist, or algorithm for assessing behaviors that identifies a prospective active shooter. Rather, there appears to be a complex combination of behaviors and interactions with bystanders that may often occur in the days, weeks, and months leading up to an attack. Early recognition *and* reporting of concerning behaviors to law enforcement or threat assessment professionals may initiate important opportunities for mitigation.

PRIMARY GRIEVANCE

A grievance is defined for this study as the cause of the active shooter's distress or resentment; a perception — not necessarily based in reality — of having been wronged or treated unfairly or inappropriately.^{24,25,26} More than a typical feeling of resentment or passing anger, a grievance often results in a grossly distorted preoccupation with a sense of injustice, like an injury that fails to heal. These thoughts can saturate a person's thinking and foster a pervasive sense of imbalance between self-image and the (real or perceived) humiliation. This nagging sense of unfairness can spark an overwhelming desire to “right the wrong” and achieve a measure of satisfaction and/or revenge. In some cases, an active shooter might have what appeared to be multiple grievances but, where possible, the FBI sought to determine the primary grievance. Based on a review of the academic literature and the facts of the cases themselves, the FBI identified eight categories of grievances, with an additional category of “other” for grievances that were entirely idiosyncratic.

As shown in the following table, the FBI could not identify a primary grievance for 13 (21%) of the active shooters, either because they did not have one or because there was insufficient evidence to determine whether one existed. While it may be particularly difficult to understand the motivation(s) for attacks that do not appear to be based on identifiable grievances, these active shooters still displayed concerning behaviors, were under identifiable stressors, and engaged in planning and preparation activities. For example, for the active shooters where no grievance could be identified, all had at least two behaviors (with an average of 5.4 behaviors) that were noted to be concerning by others.

24 Calhoun, T., & Weston, S., (2003).

25 Fein, R., & Vossekuil, B. (1999).

26 Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2004).

The majority (79%, $n = 50$) of the active shooters did appear to be acting in accord with a grievance of some kind. Of course, the grievance itself may not have been reasonable or even grounded in reality, but it appeared to serve as the rationale for the eventual attack, giving a sense of purpose to the shooter. Most of these grievances seem to have originated in response to some specific action taken regarding the active shooter. Whether interpersonal, employment, governmental, academic, or financial, these actions were (or were perceived to be) directed against the active shooter personally. In contrast, grievances driven by more global or broad considerations — such as ideology or hatred of a group — account for less than 7% of the overall cases. In general then, active shooters harbored grievances that were distinctly personal to them and the circumstances of their daily lives.

TABLE 4: PRIMARY GRIEVANCE

Primary Grievance	Number	%
Adverse interpersonal action against the shooter	21	33
Adverse employment action against the shooter	10	16
Other (e.g. general hatred of others)	6	10
Adverse governmental action against the shooter	3	5
Adverse academic action against the shooter	2	3
Adverse financial action against the shooter	2	3
Domestic	2	3
Hate crime	2	3
Ideology/extremism	2	3
Unknown	13	21

Precipitating Events

Of the 50 active shooters who had an identifiable grievance, nearly half of them experienced a precipitating or triggering event related to the grievance (44%, $n = 22$). Seven active shooters (14%) did not experience a precipitating event, and the FBI could not determine whether the remaining 21 (42%) did. Precipitating events generally occurred close in time to the shooting and included circumstances such as an adverse ruling in a legal matter, romantic rejection, and the loss of a job.

These precipitating events were of more consequence in the timing of the attack, and while they appear to have accelerated the active shooter’s movement on the trajectory to violence, they did not by themselves appear to set the course.

Considerations

Of course, many people have grievances and never act violently. What caused the active shooters in this study to act the way they did cannot be explained simply by the presence of a grievance. There was likely the interaction of a variety of operational considerations and psychological stressors that eventually crystallized in the decision to ignore non-violent options and choose to attack. However, the types of grievances most commonly experienced by the active shooters in this study may be important considerations for the many threat assessment teams and law enforcement professionals who work each day to assess a subject’s progression along the pathway to violence.

TARGETING

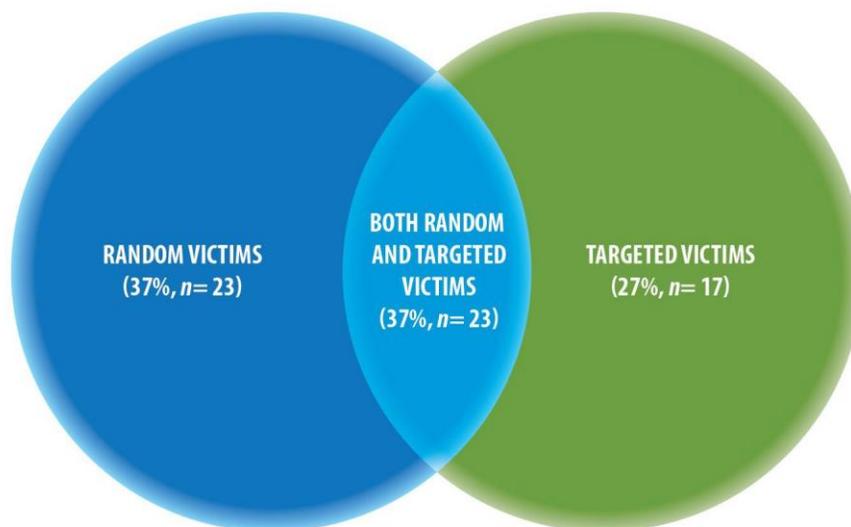
For this study, a target is defined as a person or group of people who were *identifiable before the shooting occurred* and whom the active shooter intended to attack. It was not necessary that the active shooter knew the target by name; intending to attack a person holding a position at or affiliated with a business, educational facility, or in a governmental agency sufficed. The target could be a group, so long as members of that group could have been identified prior to the attack.

In cases where the victims could not reasonably have been identified prior to the shooting, the active shooter was deemed to have selected the victims at random. While there is *some* element of selection in any attack where there is more than one potential victim (unless the active shooter literally does not aim at all), the FBI considered victims to be random where there was: 1) no known connection between the active shooter and the victims, and 2) the victims were not specifically linked to the active shooter's grievance.

In many cases, there was a mix of targeted and random victims in the same shooting. The typical circumstance occurred when an active shooter went to a location with targets in mind and also shot others who were at the same location, either because they presented some obstacle in the attack or for reasons that could not be identified.

The overall numbers for targeted and random victims are listed below:

FIGURE 10



*Does not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Considerations

While approximately one-third of active shooters in this sample victimized only random members of the public, most active shooters arrive at a targeted site with a specific person or persons in mind. Awareness of targeting behaviors can provide valuable insight for threat assessment professionals. Relatedly, the FBI has observed that when an active shooter's grievance generalizes — that is, expands beyond a desire to punish a specific individual to a desire to punish an institution or community — this should be considered to be progression along a trajectory towards violence and ultimately a threat-enhancing characteristic.

SUICIDE: IDEATION AND ATTEMPTS

For this study, “suicidal ideation” was defined as thinking about or planning suicide, while “suicide attempt” was defined as a non-fatal, self-directed behavior with the intent to die, regardless of whether the behavior ultimately results in an injury of any kind. Although these definitions are broad, the FBI concluded that an active shooter had suicidal ideation or engaged in a suicide attempt only when based on specific, non-trivial evidence.

Nearly half of the active shooters had suicidal ideation or engaged in suicide-related behaviors at some time prior to the attack (48%, $n = 30$), while five active shooters (8%) displayed no such behaviors (the status of the remaining 28 active shooters was unknown due to a lack of sufficient evidence to make a reasonable determination).

An overwhelming majority of the 30 suicidal active shooters showed signs of suicidal ideation (90%, $n = 27$), and seven made actual suicide attempts (23%). Nearly three-quarters (70%, $n = 21$) of these behaviors occurred within one year of the shooting.

Considerations

The high levels²⁷ of pre-attack suicidal ideation — with many appearing within 12 months of the attack — are noteworthy as they represent an opportunity for intervention. If suicidal ideation or attempts in particular are observed by others, reframing bystander awareness within the context of a mass casualty event may help to emphasize the importance of telling an authority figure and getting help for the suicidal person. Without stigmatizing those who struggle with thoughts of self-harm, researchers and practitioners must continue to explore those active shooters who combined suicide with externalized aggression (including homicidal violence) and identify the concurrent behaviors that reflect this shift.

CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS

One useful way to analyze concerning communications is to divide them into two categories: *threats/confrontations* and *leakage of intent*.

Threats/Confrontations

Threats are *direct communications to a target* of intent to harm and may be delivered in person or by other means (e.g., text, email, telephone). For this study, threats need not be verbalized or written; the FBI considered in-person confrontations that were intended to intimidate or cause safety concerns for the target as falling under the category of threats as well.

More than half of the 40 active shooters who had a target made threats or had a prior confrontation (55%, $n = 22$). When threats or confrontations occurred, they were almost always in person (95%, $n = 21$) and only infrequently in writing or electronically (14%, $n = 3$). Two active shooters made threats both in person and in writing/electronically.

Leakage

Leakage occurs when a person intentionally or unintentionally reveals clues to a *third-party* about feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes or intentions that may signal the intent to commit a violent act.²⁸ Indirect threats of harm are included as leakage, but so are less obvious, subtle threats, innuendo about a desire to commit a violent attack, or boasts about the ability to harm others. Leakage can be found not only in verbal communications, but

27 The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2015) shows that in 2015: 4% of adults had serious thoughts of suicide, 1.1% made serious plans, and 0.6% attempted suicide (<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DR-FFR3-2015/NSDUH-DR-FFR3-2015.htm>)

28 Meloy, J. R. & O’Toole, M. E. (2011). The concept of leakage in threat assessment. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 29, 513-527

also in writings (e.g., journals, school assignments, artwork, poetry) and in online interactions (e.g., blogs, tweets, texts, video postings). Prior research has shown that leakage of intent to commit violence is common before attacks perpetrated by both adolescents and adults, but is more common among adolescents.^{29,30,31}

Here, too, leakage was prevalent, with over half of the active shooters leaking intent to commit violence (56%, $n = 35$). In the Phase II sample, 88% ($n = 7$) of those active shooters age 17 and younger leaked intent to commit violence, while 51% ($n = 28$) of adult active shooters leaked their intent. The leaked intent to commit violence was not always directed at the eventual victims of the shootings; in some cases what was communicated was a more general goal of doing harm to others, apparently without a particular person or group in mind. For example, one active shooter talked to a clerk at a gas station about killing “a family” and another expressed interest in becoming a sniper like a character featured in *The Turner Diaries*. In 16 of the 40 cases (40%) where the active shooter had a target, however, the leaked intent to act violently was directly pertaining to that target. In these cases, the leakage was generally a statement to a third-party of the intent to specifically harm the target.

Legacy Tokens

Finally, the FBI considered whether or not an active shooter had constructed a “legacy token” which has been defined as a communication prepared by the offender to claim credit for the attack and articulate the motives underlying the shooting.³² Examples of legacy tokens include manifestos, videos, social media postings, or other communications deliberately created by the shooter and delivered or staged for discovery by others, usually near in time to the shooting. In 30% ($n = 19$) of the cases included in this study, the active shooter created a legacy token prior to the attack.

Considerations

Although more than half of the active shooters with pre-attack targets made threats ($n = 22$), in the majority (65%) of the overall cases no threats were made to a target, and the FBI cautions that the absence of a direct threat should not be falsely reassuring to those assessing the potential for violence raised by other circumstances and factors. Nor should the presence of a threat be considered conclusive. There is a significant amount of research and experience to demonstrate that direct threats are not correlated to a subsequent act of targeted violence.^{33,34,35,36,37,38}

It is important to highlight that in this Phase II study the overwhelming majority of direct threats were verbally delivered by the offender to a future victim. Only a very small percentage of threats were communicated via writing or electronically. In many ways this is not surprising. Written, directly communicated threats against a target (e.g., “I’m going to shoot and kill everyone here on Tuesday”) often spark a predictable response that includes a heightened law enforcement presence and the enhancement of security barriers. These responses are highly undesirable to an offender planning an active shooting.³⁹ Verbal threats issued directly to another person appear to be far more common among the active shooters included in the Phase II study.

29 Hemple, A., Meloy, J.R., & Richards, T. (1999). Offender and offense characteristics of a nonrandom sample of mass murderers. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 27, 213-225. Meloy, J.R., Hoffman, J., Guldemann, A., & James, D. (2011). The role of warning behaviors in threat assessment: An exploration and suggested typology. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 30, 256-279.

30 Meloy, J. R. & O’Toole, M. E. (2011).

31 Meloy, J.R., Hoffman, J., Guldemann, A., & James, D. (2011). The role of warning behaviors in threat assessment: An exploration and suggested typology. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 30, 256-279.

32 Simons, A., & Tunkel, R. (2014). The assessment of anonymous threatening communications. In J.R. Meloy & J. Hoffman (Eds.), *International handbook of threat assessment* (pp. 195-213). New York: Oxford University Press.

33 Borum, R., Fein, R. Vossekuil, B., & Berglund, J. (1999). Threat assessment: Defining an approach for evaluating risk of targeted violence. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 17, 323-337.

34 Calhoun, F. (1998). Hunters and howlers: *Threats and violence against federal judicial officials in the United States, 1789-1993*. Arlington, VA: US Marshals Service.

35 Calhoun T. & Weston, S. (2003).

36 Dietz, P., Matthews, D., Martell, D., Stewart, T., Hrouda, D., & Warren, J. (1991a). Threatening and otherwise inappropriate letters to members of the United States Congress. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 36, 1445-1468.

37 Dietz, P., Matthews, D., VanDuyne, C., Martell, D., Parry, C., Stewart, T., et al. (1991b). Threatening and otherwise inappropriate letters to Hollywood celebrities. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 36, 185-209.

38 Meloy, J.R. (2000). *Violence risk and threat assessment*. San Diego: Specialized Training Services.

39 Simons A. & Tunkel, R. (2014)

Whether verbal or written, concerning communications are challenging as those on the receiving end must assess sometimes ominously vague or nebulous verbiage. Such confusion can create doubt in the listener's mind as to the communicator's true intent toward violence.⁴⁰ As law enforcement agencies continue to remind bystanders if they "see something, say something" it becomes relevant to use this data (particularly regarding leakage behaviors) to lower the internal threshold for reporting, even in the face of ambiguous language. It is troubling to note that no bystanders reported instances of leakage to law enforcement, perhaps out of a fear of overreacting or perhaps due to a lack of understanding as to what law enforcement's response would be. This suggests that more robust efforts need to be made to educate bystanders (especially students and adolescents) on the nature of leakage and its potential significance.

Limitations

The findings presented in this report reflect a thorough and careful review of the data derived almost exclusively from law enforcement records. Nevertheless, there are limitations to the study which should be kept in mind before drawing any conclusions based on the findings.

First, the Phase I study on which the present analysis is based included only a specific type of event. Shootings must have been (a) in progress in a public place and (b) law enforcement personnel and/or citizens had the potential to affect the outcome of the event based on their responses. The FBI acknowledges there is an inherent element of subjectivity in deciding whether a case meets the study criteria. Moreover, while every effort was made to find all cases between 2000 and 2013 which met the definition, it is possible that cases which should have been included in the study were not identified. Overall, as with the Phase I study, the incidents included in the Phase II study were not intended to and did not comprise all gun-related violence or mass or public shootings occurring between 2000 and 2013.

Second, although the FBI took a cautious approach in answering protocol questions and limited speculation by relying on identifiable data, there was some degree of subjectivity in evaluating which of the original 160 cases had sufficient data to warrant inclusion in the study.

Third, while reliance on official law enforcement investigative files was reasonable based on the study's objectives, the level of detail contained in these files was not uniform throughout and the FBI was not able to definitively answer all protocol questions for all subjects.

This is a purely descriptive study. With the exception of mental health and suicidal behaviors, the FBI did not make any comparisons to the general population or to criminals who were not active shooters. Therefore, we cannot postulate on the probability as to whether some of the behaviors and characteristics seen here would also have been seen in other populations. Furthermore, the FBI cautions readers to not treat the observed behaviors as having predictive value in determining if a person will become violent or not, as the findings and observations presented herein are not a "checklist" but instead are offered to promote awareness among potential bystanders and for consideration in the context of a thorough, holistic threat assessment by trained professionals. Future research may benefit from comparisons between those who completed active shooting attacks and those who planned to attack but were disrupted prior to the offense, and/or in comparison to those individuals who may have displayed concerning behaviors but had no true intent to commit an act of targeted violence.

⁴⁰ The FBI noted that there were four cases where threats were made and someone notified law enforcement (out of 22 cases where a threat was made, or 14%)

Conclusion

The ability to utilize case files (as compared to open-source documents) allowed the FBI to carefully examine both the internal issues experienced and the behaviors demonstrated by active shooters in the weeks and months preceding their attacks. What emerges is a complex and troubling picture of individuals who fail to successfully navigate multiple stressors in their lives while concurrently displaying four to five observable, concerning behaviors, engaging in planning and preparation, and frequently communicating threats or leaking indications of an intent to attack. As an active shooter progresses on a trajectory towards violence, these observable behaviors may represent critical opportunities for detection and disruption.

The information contained in this Phase II report can be utilized by myriad safety stakeholders. The successful prevention of an active shooting frequently depends on the collective and collaborative engagement of varied community members: law enforcement officials, teachers, mental health care professionals, family members, threat assessment professionals, friends, social workers, school resource officers...and many others. A shared awareness of the common observable behaviors demonstrated by the active shooters in this study may help to prompt inquiries and focus assessments at every level of contact and every stage of intervention.

While many dedicated professionals work to thwart active shootings, the FBI suspects that future active shooters themselves are looking for ways to avoid detection and maximize damage as they plan and prepare for their acts of violence. The prevention of these future attacks will depend on our ability to remain agile and recognize evolving pre-attack behaviors. To that end, the FBI continues to study active shooters to better inform all safety stakeholders and to support the development of sound threat mitigation strategies.

As tragically seen from current events, active shootings continue to impact our nation. The FBI hopes that the information contained in this Phase II study will help in efforts to promote safety across all communities.

Appendix A:

STRESSORS

Abuse of illicit drugs or alcohol: difficulties caused by the effects of drugs/alcohol and/or frustrations related to obtaining these substances.

Civil legal problems: being party to a non-trivial lawsuit or administrative action.

Conflict with friends/peers: general tension in the relationship beyond what is typical for the active shooter's age or specific instances of serious and ongoing disagreement.

Conflict with other family members: general tension in the relationship beyond what is typical for the active shooter's age, or specific instances of serious and ongoing disagreement.

Conflict with parents: general tension in the relationship beyond what is typical for the active shooter's age, or specific instances of serious and ongoing disagreement.

Criminal legal problems: arrests, convictions, probation, parole.

Death of friend/relative: death that caused emotional or psychological distress.

Financial strain: related to job loss, debt collection, potential or actual eviction, inability to pay normal and usual daily bills.

Job-related problems: ongoing conflicts with co-workers or management, pervasive poor performance evaluations, or disputes over pay or leave.

Marital problems/conflict with intimate partner(s)/divorce or separation: difficulties in the relationship that were a consistent source of psychological distress and/or which did or were likely to lead to the end of the relationship or the desire to end the relationship.

Mental health problems: symptoms of anxiety, depression, paranoia, or other mental health concerns that have a negative effect on daily functioning and/or relationships.

Other: any other circumstance causing physical, psychological, or emotional difficulties that interfere in a non-trivial way with normal functioning in daily life.

Physical injury: physical condition/injury that significantly interfered with or restricted normal and usual activities.

School-related problems: conflicts with teachers and staff that go beyond single instances of minor discipline; pervasive frustration with academic work; inability to follow school rules.

Sexual stress/frustration: pronounced and ongoing inability to establish a desired sexual relationship.

Appendix B:

CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

Amount or quality of sleep: unusual sleep patterns or noticeable changes in sleep patterns.

Anger: inappropriate displays of aggressive attitude/temper.

Change, escalation, or contextually inappropriate firearms behavior: interest in or use of firearms that appears unusual given the active shooter's background and experience with firearms.

Changes in weight or eating habits: significant weight loss or gain related to eating habits.

Hygiene or personal appearance: noticeable and/or surprising changes in appearance or hygiene practices.

Impulsivity: actions that in context appear to have been taken without usual care or forethought.

Interpersonal interactions: more than the usual amount of discord in ongoing relationships with family, friends, or colleagues.

Leakage: communication to a third-party of the intent to harm another person.

Mental health: indications of depression, anxiety, paranoia or other mental health concerns.

Other: any behavior not otherwise captured in above categories that causes more than a minimal amount of worry in the observer.

Physical aggression: inappropriate use of force; use of force beyond what was usual in the circumstances.

Physical health: significant changes in physical well-being beyond minor injuries and ailments.

Quality of thinking or communication: indications of confused or irrational thought processes.

Risk-taking: actions that show more than a usual disregard for significant negative consequences.

School performance: appreciable decrease in academic performance; unexplained or unusual absences.

Sexual behavior: pronounced increases or decreases in sexual interest or practices.

Threats/Confrontations: direct communications to a target of intent to harm. May be delivered in person or by other means (e.g., text, email, telephone).

Use of illicit drugs or illicit use of prescription drugs: sudden and/ recent use or change in use of drugs; use beyond social norms that interferes with the activities of daily life.

Use or abuse of alcohol: sudden and/or recent use or changes in use of alcohol; use beyond social norms that interferes with the activities of daily life.

Violent media usage: more than a usual age-appropriate interest in visual or aural depictions of violence.

Work performance: appreciable decrease in job performance; unexplained or unusual absences.



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