A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR THREAT ASSESSMENT
AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS

Presented by:
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Website
http://www.studentthreatassessment.org
The presentation will:

• Review the research and basic principles regarding threat assessment and threat management.

• Provide an overview of an existing multi-disciplinary, multi-agency threat assessment and management system. Explore changes to the system that may be necessary to adapt to the existing resources of this community.

• Training on the use of protocols for K-12 campus threat assessment with a focus on school site based (Level 1) assessment.

• Review the steps, developmental procedures and protocols necessary to further develop the current threat assessment system with established community support (Level 2) team.

• Provide Lab exercises and case reviews.
The presentation will not...

provide all of the training necessary to establish a level of expertise in leading Community Level threat assessment investigations or in leading community threat assessment teams. Advanced training in threat assessment and threat management is available through job shadowing team members, through the resources noted in the book (pages 155-156) or by searching the web for threat assessment training.

Edited by John Van Dreal

Rowman and Littlefield
(800) 462-6420.
email orders@rowman.com.
website http://www.rowmanlittlefield.com/
(or at Amazon and other on-line book vendors)
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JUSTIFICATIONS

1. Concerns regarding violence and school safety.
2. Response to (ORS 339.250) requiring policy and procedure.
Advantages of a Threat Assessment System

• Shared ownership, shared responsibility. Decreased liability.
• Multi-discipline, multi-agency.
• Expeditious but methodical.
• Community collaboration and ownership.
• Identification of risk in clear terms.
• Interventions and supervision strategies that fit the situation and accurately address risk.
• Promotes observation and supervision.
• Increases both the physical safety of a community and the psychological sense of safety.
DEFINITION OF A THREAT

The intention
to commit harm to a target
or be a menace or source of danger to a target.
The Threat Assessment System objectives are:

1. **Assess** threats of potentially harmful or lethal behavior and determine the level of concern and action required.

3. **Organize** resources and strategies to **manage** situations involving people that pose threats to others.

4. **Maintain** a sense of psychological safety within the community.

We don’t do:
- Predictive Profiling
- Enhanced Professional Judgment
- Artificial Intuition
AGGRESSION CONTINUUM
(from Eric M. Johnson, PhD.)

Bombing
Shooting
Raping
Stabbing
Beating
Strangling
(Violent Aggression: serious or lethal injury)

Sexual coercion
Fighting
Hitting with objects
Throwing objects
Slugging
Kicking
Scratching
Biting
Slapping
Pushing
(Aggression Behavior: low to moderate injury)
What is Threat Assessment?

As defined by the Secret Service (Threat Assessment in Schools pg. 29): “The primary purpose of a threat assessment is to prevent targeted violence. The threat assessment process is centered upon analysis of the facts and evidence of behavior in a given situation. The appraisal of risk in a threat assessment focuses on actions, communications, and specific circumstances that might suggest that an individual intends to mount an attack and is engaged in planning or preparing for that event.”

In other words, it is the assessment of the “unique” interaction and dynamics between the perpetrator, the target and the situation they share. The question is “does the student ‘pose’ a threat,” not “did the student ‘make’ a threat.”
Context and Situation

The assessment of the “unique” interaction and dynamics between the perpetrator, the target and the situation they share. The question is “does the person ‘pose’ a threat,” not “did the person ‘make’ a threat.”
Targeted and Reactive

• REACTIVE / AFFECTIVE / IMPULSIVE

• TARGETED / PREMEDITATED / PREDATORY
Reactive / Affective Type

- Absence of planning
- Usually associated with elevated emotional state
- Perpetrator of violence feels under immediate threat
TARGETED AGGRESSION
Targeted Violence (process)

- Ideation
- Planning
- Preparation
- Implementation
Targeted violence is the result of an understandable and often discernible process of thinking and behavior.

Violence stems from an interaction between the potential attacker, past stressful events, a current situation and the target.

The subject will display “attack-related” behaviors that move along a continuum of idea to action, including thinking, planning and logistical preparations.
ATTACK RELATED BEHAVIOR

Behavior that supports the threat as a More serious consideration...

EXAMPLES:

• PLANNING
• PREPARATION
• WEAPONS ACQUISITION
• REHEARSAL
• SCHEDULING
• OTHERS?
Threats and Communication

Inappropriate Communication: Any unwarranted contact or approach that is strange, threatening or ominously predictive and intended to unsettle or unnerve. Can be direct threats, indirect threats, veiled threats and conditional threats:

- Direct Threat
- Indirect Threat
- Veiled Threat
- Expressive Threat
Pre-Incident Indicators (or Antecedents)

Pre-incident indicators (Calhoun, 1998; de Becker, 1998) are actions, communications or circumstances that indicate an individual or group is considering or planning a violent act.
Accelerator, Triggers and Precipitating Events

Accelerators are destabilizing factors that increase the potential for individuals to resort to violence. These include (some are more specific to adults): illness, divorce, financial crisis, decreased or terminated employment, and perceived ongoing abandonment/rejection. Triggers, precipitating events are similar to accelerators but tend to be acute experiences or circumstances that aggravate an individual or group further toward a violent act (Meloy, 2000).
J.A.C.A. - Gavin DeBecker

- Justification
- Alternatives
- Consequences
- Ability
The Exceptional Case Study Project (ECSP)

• The Exceptional Case Study Project was initially completed by the United States Secret Service in 1998. The project analyzed 83 persons who had engaged in assassination attacks or near-attack behaviors from the previous 46 years. The results of the study provided an objectified definition of targeted violence and concluded that targeted attackers do not have consistent profiles.

• The study also noted that mental illness plays almost no role in determining violence potential but did identify and emphasize the concept of “attack-related behaviors.” Finally, the study noted that most attackers consider many targets prior to attacks and that risk is best determined through an investigation of the attack-related behaviors as they relate to the potential attacker’s ideation.
Critical Factors (*consistently present in histories of school shooters*):

- Peer Relationships Problems.
- Weapon Fascination and access.
- Recent loss, humiliation.
- Signs of depression, suicidal ideation or actions.
- Disconnect from adults.

Contributing Factors (*associated with aggression, but not consistently present*):

- Poor school achievement. (grades, truancy, class disruption, suspension).
- Negative parent-child relationship (family distress, poor supervision).
- Exposure to violence.
- Substance abuse.
- Mental illness.
(USSS research continued)

Key Points:

• Shootings were rarely impulsive.

• No consistent profile of school shooter.

• Shooters had difficulty coping with loss and failure.

• Shooters perceived or experienced severe longstanding rejection and bullying by peers.

• Motives were mostly revenge and problem-solving.

• Peers knew of plan ahead of time (some collaborated).

• All attackers used guns. Most shooters had ready access to guns. Some made considerable efforts to acquire guns.

• Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to attack.

• All shooters were of concern to parents, teachers and / or peers.
FBI Critical Incident Response Group

Personality Traits and Behavior:

- Leakage
- Low Tolerance for Frustration
- Lack of Resiliency
- Poor Coping Skills
- Failed Love Relationship
- Injustice Collector
- Signs of Depression
- Narcissism
- Alienation
- Dehumanizing Others
- Lack of Empathy
- Exaggerated Sense of Entitlement
- Attitude of Superiority
- Exaggerated or Pathological Need for Attention
- Externalizes Blame

- Masks Low Self-Esteem
- Anger Management Problems
- Intolerance
- Inappropriate Humor
- Seeks to Manipulate Others
- Lack of Trust
- Closed Social Group
- Change of Behavior
- Rigid and Opinionated
- Unusual Interest in Sensational Violence
- Fascination with Violence-Filled Entertainment
- Negative Role Models
- Behavior Appears Relevant to Carrying out a Threat
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Family Dynamics:
- Turbulent Parent-Child Relationship
- Acceptance of Pathological Behavior
- Access to Weapons
- Lack of Intimacy
- Student “Rules the Roost”
- No Limits or Monitoring of TV and Internet

School Dynamics:
- Student’s Attachment to School
- Tolerance for Disrespectful Behavior
- Inequitable Discipline
- Inflexible Culture
- Pecking Order Among Students
- Code of Silence
- Unsupervised Computer Access
FBI Critical Incident Response Group

Social Dynamics:

• Media, Entertainment, Technology
• Peer Groups
• Drugs and Alcohol
• Outside Interests
• The Copycat Effect
Katherine S. Newman

Five necessary but not sufficient conditions for a rampage shooting:

1. Perception of self as extremely marginal within the social world that has value. Bullying and social exclusion lead to marginalization and increase frustration and depression.

2. Psychological problems and vulnerability. Mental illness, severe depression and abuse decrease emotional, psychological and coping reserves, thus magnifying impact of marginalization.

3. Cultural scripts. Cultural or media models of violence are readily available as examples of solving problems, getting even, releasing discomfort or elevating social status.

4. Failure of surveillance systems. Systems intended to identify troubled youth are ineffective or non-existent.

5. Gun availability.
Supervisory Special Agent Andre Simons

From anecdotal observations and work on the recently published report *Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education*.

- Significant personal stress, humiliation, and/or perceived failure
- Aggressive Martyrdom (Reid Meloy).
- Psychologically transformational acts
- The brittle student
- Leakage, hyper profanity, negative emotional language, lack of future planning, weapons investigation or possession, and an inability to take personal responsibility for actions and outcomes.
- Solution to perceived problems
- Wills, manifestos, infamy and notoriety
- Pseudo-commando
OTHER RESEARCH, OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
RESEARCH SUMMARY

1. What kind of communication has the student made regarding their intention to harm others? Is the communication a statement of anger such as “I’m going to kill you…” or does it involve details of planning or an ongoing consideration of an attack?

2. Is there a motive? Does the student experience or perceive severe rejection of bullying from other students?

3. Are there indications of behavior that increase the possibility of violence occurring (plan, acquiring weapons, rehearsal or simulation, other preparations, scheduling)?

4. Is there a specific target?

5. Is there peer collaboration? Are peers aware of or concerned about a potential attack?

6. Does the situation involve student/students who are out of alternatives, marginalized and disenfranchised, low on psychological reserves, out of acceptable coping strategies, and willing to accept the consequences of carrying out the threat?

7. Are there personality or behavioral traits, family dynamics, School system issues or social dynamics that lead to a more vulnerable and potentially escalating situation.
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Violence or Aggression?
Targeted or Reactive?

- Vindictive
- Bullying
- Mentally or emotionally troubled
- Gang
- Relationship, Stalking
- Rampage Shooting
Six Common Situations

• Three boys, engaging in BB gun wars after school, violent first person shooter games, knife collecting, and aggressive / violent behavior.

• One boy, has a large knife in his backpack (claims he used it hunting with his father the previous weekend and forgot it was there).

• One boy, brings a knife (or even a gun) to school as a defensive means of protecting himself against bullies who are tormenting him and extorting his money.

• One Boy… an aggressive bully. Brings knife / gun to school to intimidate others.

• One boy, speaks of shooting others at school as revenge for being ignored and rejected and to show that he is not weak or afraid.

• Two boys, both identified as Emotionally Disturbed and attending school in a self-contained classroom. One is very aggressive, engaging in combative talk, threatening teachers and students if he doesn’t get his way, is extremely irritable and has a very short fuse. The other is a follower but if pushed, can become extremely explosive and aggressive.
1. Assess the emotional climate. Promote listening and paying attention.

2. Adopt a strong, but caring position against the “code of silence.”

3. Implement systems to prevent and intervene in bullying.

4. Involve all members of the school community in creating a safe and respectful school culture.

5. Foster and develop trusting relationships between each student and at least one adult at school.

6. Create mechanisms for sustaining a safe school climate (such as a system that assesses and manages potential violence.)
STUDENT THREAT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM
CONFIDENTIALITY AND THREAT ASSESSMENT

(A School Threat Assessment Team should consult with their respective legal counsel on existing laws and regulations prior to the development of information-sharing policies.)

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): A Federal law that protects the privacy of education records or any records that contain information directly relating to a student and that are maintained by the educational institution or a person acting for the institution. FERPA permits disclosure of personally identifiable information without consent in certain circumstances, including:

1. To school officials with legitimate educational interests as established by FERPA...
3. To appropriate officials in health and safety emergencies...
5. To comply with a lawfully issued judicial order or subpoena.

A FEW MORE DETAILS REGARDING FERPA AND INFORMATION SHARING

• Information from education records may be shared with police, social services, or other community representatives who are serving on a school’s established threat assessment committee, if they are school official’s with legitimate educational interests in accordance with the school’s established criteria. Such individuals may not use that information for any purpose other than consideration on that committee, nor may they take the information back to their agencies or share it with anyone else except under the provisions of FERPA.

• A school’s law enforcement unit’s records are excluded from the definition of “education records.”

• FERPA does not protect the confidentiality of information, in general. It protects information from education records. Therefore, if education staff reports information regarding a student’s behavior or communication to members of the threat assessment committee, the information is not protected by FERPA since it was not provided through an education record.

• FERPA does not have a personal liability recourse. Claims are made through US Dept. of Ed against schools. Personal claims are made through state law.
The new regulations impose a "rational basis" test on a school's decisions to disclose information in emergency situations. "The Department [of Education] will not substitute its judgment for that of the agency or institution if, based on the information available at the time ... there is a rational basis for the agency's or institution's determination that a health or safety emergency exists."
Leroy Rooker says:
(Director of the US. Department of Education’s Family Policy Compliance Office)

- "We wanted to strike that balance between privacy and safety and certainly emphasize that safety on a campus is paramount. As long as you can articulate what that emergency was, we're not going to be in the business of second-guessing you on that."

- Still, according to the new rules, administrators must document what emergency circumstances prompted their decision to disclose information.
Oregon statute or administrative rules that promote shared information regarding health and safety risk:

• ORS 336.187 A and B allow discussion and protective reporting.

• ORS 339.312 suggests safe schools alliance between schools, Juv. Justice and law enforcement.

• OAR 581-021-0380 outlines health and safety emergencies that obligate discussion and reporting.
INITIATE LEVEL 1 IF THE FOLLOWING IS KNOWN OR SUSPECTED:

- Threat, aggression or violence is specific to identified target with motive and plan.
- Threat, aggression or violence is causing considerable fear or disruption to activity.
- Weapon at School or attempt to bring a weapon.
- There is continued intent to carry out threat.
- There is a history of threats, aggression or violence.
- Staff, parent or student intuition suggests a need to investigate threatening circumstances.
- Administrator is unable to determine if a situation poses a risk to school personnel or the community.
SALEM KEIZER SCHOOL DISTRICT
STUDENT THREAT ASSESSMENT and MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Flow Chart - Level 2

Student Threat Assessment Team
Level 2 Assessment Steps

**Step #1**
Consultation - Investigation Team
(Meets w/Site Team at School Building)

1. Collects information
2. Begins Level 2 Assessment
3. Assists Site Team w/Mgt. Plan

Team Includes:
- School Psychologist
- Mental Health Practitioner
- Law Enforcement

**As Needed**
- Oregon Youth Authority
- Dept. Human Services
- Juvenile Dept.
- Other case managers

Investigation Team schedules case for further STAT review

**Step #2**
(Further Consultation and Investigation)

Convenes weekly.

- Site Team (Administrator)
- Salem Keizer School District
- Willamette ESD
- Marion County Sheriff’s Office
- Salem Police Department
- Keizer Police Department
- Marion County Mental Health
- Polk County Mental Health
- Crisis Team
- Marion County Juvenile Dept.
- Polk County Juvenile Dept.
- Oregon Youth Authority
- Court Authority
- Others - Case Specific (Case Managers; Protective Services, etc.)

Initiate Level 2 Process

Site Team completed the Level 1 Screening and requests further investigation and/or consultation.
UNIQUE FEATURES OF YOUR SYSTEM

• FTE
• RESOURCES
• TIME
• DISTANCE
• TRAINING
• FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS
• AVAILABILITY
• AGENCY Commitment
• OTHER
Develop a template, with identified key risk factors as well as supervision strategies, that all members of the team use as a guide during assessment. Document the use of the template in every case. Document the risk concerns and document the supervision and safety planning.
K-12 LEV 1 SPECIFICS

MUST HAVE:

- Plan to Protect Victim
- Notification of Threat Log
- Notification of Threat Letter

WHAT WORKS IN YOUR SCHOOLS?

- Level 1 Assessment (options)
- Parent Questionnaire
- Teacher Questionnaire
SALEM KEIZER SCHOOL DISTRICT

STUDENT THREAT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Level 2 Referral and Guidelines

1. Call:
   Law Enforcement
   Security Department
   Level Offices

2. Follow:
   District Safety Guidelines

IMMINENT DANGER

Level 1

Reasons to proceed with Level 2 referral.

- Student brought gun to school or attempted to acquire gun with possible intent to harm others
- Unable to confidently answer items on Level 1 Protocol
- Safety concerns significant and beyond Site Team’s ability to supervise and secure within the building
- Exploration of community resources is needed to assist in supervision

Concerns are identified (or dismissed) and team is confident in supervision, safety and resources.

Level 2
Level 2 Team Design Options

1. Use Level 2 system with Investigative Team and Level 2 Investigation Protocol.

2. Level 2 is Community Team only. Develop a form documenting the demographics of each case, the inquiry and responses regarding risk factors of that case and the supervision strategies recommended.
Moving to a Level 2 Threat Assessment?
The following questions will help determine whether or not the situation should be scheduled for a Level 2 Threat Assessment and assist in determining a course of action.

1. Where is the student on the violence continuum?
2. What kind of communication has the student/students made regarding their intention to harm others? Are the communications statements of anger such as “I’m going to kill you…” or are they expressions that involve details of planning or ongoing consideration of an attack?
3. Are there any indications of a plan such as acquiring weapons, rehearsing the attack, simulation of the attack, preparations and/or scheduling the event?
4. Is the threat target-specific?
5. Are weapons or means available to carry out the threat?
6. Does the student think that he or she is out of alternatives? For example, if the student is still willing to speak with the school counselor, he or she is NOT out of alternatives.
7. Is there a motive?
8. Is the student willing to accept the consequences of carrying out the threat?
Level 2
Investigation Protocol options

OPTION 1:

- Level 2 Investigation and summary (Education) and template.
- Law Enforcement Level 2
- Mental Health Level 2

OPTION 2:

- Template.
- Documentation regarding use of template and recommended supervision (could be responsibility of Site Team Case Manager).
PROTOCOLS

- Disclaimer
- Confidentiality / Statement Form
- Sign-in Sheet
- Reference and Review
- MOU
KEY COMPONENTS OF THREAT ASSESSMENT

• Pay attention to intuition, but focus on facts.
• Focus on behavior, not profile traits.
• Review all factors as they exist within context.
• Examine behavioral progress, changes, and movement into the targeting continuum.
• Confirm information, confirm impressions.
• Address all investigative questions regarding risk.
• Focus on prevention and inhibitors, not prediction.
• Remember the goal… identify risk, decrease that risk and improve the psychological safety and learning environment.
REPORTS AND RECORDS

- Case Notes / Personal File
- Law Enforcement Unit Record
- Confidential Envelope in Student Record
BUILDING A COLLABORATION AND CHOOSING MEMBERS
Organizing a system

- Need, justification and authorization.
- Community ownership, commitment, and responsibility.
- Policy and procedures necessary for functioning. (Legal counsel)
- Organize resources, design system and refine.
- Training, implementation, more training.
- Maintenance of program, trouble-shooting and ongoing training.
Choosing Team Members
(Modified from US Dept of Ed. and USSS)

- An ability to relate well to others.
- An awareness and sensitivity to the difference between harming and helping in an intervention.
- A reputation for fairness and trustworthiness.
- A questioning, analytical and even skeptical mindset.
- Training in the collection and evaluation of information from multiple sources.
- Discretion and an appreciation for the importance of keeping information confidential.
- Familiarity with the contemporary issues of school and community safety.
- The ability to serve as a formal link or liaison between various systems (a “boundary spanner”, a “team player” who believes in the project and the process.)
- In-depth knowledge about their own organization, resource availability, and both political and ethical boundaries.
- Full credibility and respect within their own organization.
94% of administrators stated that:

- STAT effectively identified potentially dangerous students and situations.
- STAT had positive effects on school safety.
- STAT provided important information necessary for support, discipline, and placement decisions.
- STAT fulfills a valuable role in schools.

In the same survey, 90% of administrators reported that STAT increased efficient coordination with law enforcement and mental health.
CASE REVIEW
QUESTIONS?