

# BEHAVIORAL THREAT

## ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT:

A Guide for Assessing & Managing  
Threats and Other Troubling Behavior  
that Impact the Safety of K-12 Schools

A Resource Developed by:

SIGMA, an Ontic Company

For:

Vermont School Safety Center



FINAL

# **BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT:**

## **A Guide for Assessing & Managing Threats and Other Troubling Behavior that Impact the Safety of K-12 Schools**

This guide was created as a supplemental resource for participants in the behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) training provided in Vermont by SIGMA Threat Management, an Ontic company. This guide was developed by SIGMA subject matter experts Dr. Melissa A. Reeves, Dr. Marisa Reddy Randazzo, and Dorian Van Horn, with additional contributions by William Modzeleski, Jeffrey Nolan, and Tara Conway. These contributors have extensive experience in developing and operating threat management processes in educational settings, assessing & managing individual threat cases, and conducting research on targeted violence and threat assessment in educational institutions. Some of the contributors previously served as researchers on the *Safe School Initiative* and were co-developers of the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education’s model for school threat assessment, also known as the National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) model of school threat assessment. That resource, and others authored by these contributors, are referenced throughout federal guides on high quality emergency operations plans for schools, as well as referenced in several state task force reports on preventing targeted violence in schools. More information about the contributors is available in the About the Contributors section of this guide.

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## INTRODUCTION and GUIDE PURPOSE

This guide was developed as a resource for participants who have attended Vermont's School Behavioral Threat Assessment & Management (BTAM) training. The purpose of the guide is to serve as a post-training manual that provides guidance for using behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) procedures to handle threatening and other troubling behavior that impacts the safety of K-12 schools. This guide also provides guidance on how to develop and operate behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) programs in K-12 schools and districts. This reference guide does not replace the need for training in behavioral threat assessment & management but rather can be used as an ongoing resource following completion of training.

The overall objective of this guide is to provide foundational information on behavioral threat assessment & management (BTAM), the empirical basis for this fact-finding approach, how prevention is possible, and step-by-step guidance for following the procedures detailed in the U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education model of school threat assessment (also referred to as the National Threat Assessment Center or NTAC school threat assessment model). This information should serve to help schools identify, assess, and manage threatening or significantly disruptive behaviors, with the overall goal of enhancing the safety and well-being of students, employees, and visitors. Additional books and articles about behavioral threat assessment & management and related topics are listed in the Resources section herein.

# OVERVIEW OF BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT

## What is Behavioral Threat Assessment & Management?

Behavioral threat assessment & management (BTAM) is a fact-based, systematic process designed to identify, gather information about, assess, and manage potentially dangerous or violent situations. A key goal is to distinguish between **MAKING** a threat and **POSING** a threat. The BTAM procedures detailed in the guide, as a supplement to training on school BTAM procedures, will help users to make this critical distinction. Moreover, the procedures will help users to develop and implement “case management” plans (also known as intervention plans) in situations where someone poses a threat and intervention is needed to reduce that threat or risk.

Threatening and other disturbing behavior can come in a variety of forms. A threat may be:

- expressed/communicated verbally, behaviorally, visually, in writing, electronically, and/or through other means
- expressed directly or indirectly
- issued by someone known or unknown to the target
- might be veiled or not immediately understood

BTAM teams and programs are designed to address any behavior or communication that raises concern that a person or situation may pose a danger to the safety of the school, campus, or workplace.

## The BTAM Process

Behavioral threat assessment and management is a systematic process designed to:

- **Identify** the subject(s)/situation(s) whose behavior or impact has raised some concern
- **Gather** additional relevant information about the subject/situation in a lawful and ethical manner.

Note: The focus of BTAM is to understand the situation and how best to mitigate safety concerns. It is not the same as a criminal or disciplinary investigative process.

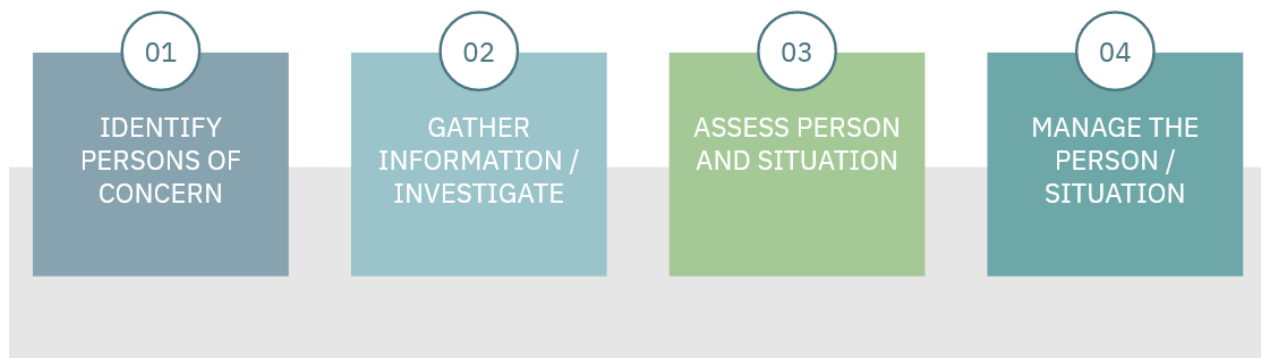
- **Assess** the situation, in context, based on the totality of the information that is reasonably, lawfully and ethically available to determine whether the subject/situation

*poses* a threat of violence or harm to others and/or self; and,

- **Manage** the threat by implementing an intervention, supervision, and/or monitoring plan to prevent harm where possible and to reduce/mitigate impact of the situation.

## What Threat Assessment IS

A SYSTEMATIC PROCESS THAT IS DESIGNED TO:



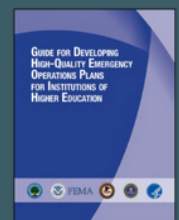
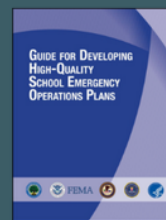
**NOTE:** *It is very important to follow the full BTAM process. Shortcutting steps (for example, jumping from “Identify” to “Manage”) raises the risk of not fully understanding the entire situation and managing the situation incorrectly because of inaccurate or incomplete information.*

### An Evidence-Based Model

The behavioral threat assessment & management process is recognized as best practice for addressing, evaluating, and managing threatening behavior and troubling situations that may impact school safety. The model described in this guide was originally created by the U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education (2002) and now is referred to as the National Threat Assessment or “NTAC” model of behavioral threat assessment & management (2018). The NTAC model is an evidence-based model, based upon empirical

## Best practice resources

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research on targeted violence in schools as well as empirical research on averted school attacks. It is also informed by decades of practice in using the NTAC model to handle thousands of cases of threatening behavior impacting school safety. Appendix D includes a list of resources that recommend BTAM as best practice and that provide detailed guidance on the NTAC model.

## What Threat Assessment IS

BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT IS FACT-BASED AND DEDUCTIVE



BTAM is also recognized as best practice because it is a deductive process that focuses on the facts of the matter at hand, what conclusions those facts allow us to draw and what resources are most applicable based on the known facts. The BTAM process is NOT the same thing as profiling, which involves inductive reasoning rather than the deductive reasoning that BTAM involves (see text box below for more information on how threat assessment differs from profiling).

### Is threat assessment the same as profiling?

No. Threat assessment is the antithesis of profiling. Profiling involves making generalizations about an individual based on the individual's similarity to high-risk groups, it is an inductive process. Threat assessment involves an individualized assessment of the subject of concern, in a particular situation, and at a particular point in time. The process is deductive, dynamic and responsive to the nature and process of the threatening situation. For further information about the differences between threat assessment, profiling, and clinical assessment of dangerousness (aka violence risk assessment), please see:

Reddy, M., Borum, R., Berglund, J., Vossekuil, B., Fein, R. & Modzeleski, W. (2001). *Evaluating Risk for Targeted Violence in Schools: Comparing Risk Assessment, Threat Assessment, and Other Approaches*. *Psychology in the Schools*, 38(2), 157-172.

## BTAM Process at a Glance

Later in this guide, we provide detailed, step-by-step procedures for handling a threat -- or other troubling behavior -- from start to finish. For the purposes of this section, below is an overview of what happens when a threat – or other troubling behavior – is reported to a BTAM team:

1. Assemble team to brief them on the new threat/troubling behavior
2. Screen initial report to determine if the team should run a threat assessment

If a threat assessment is needed, the team will proceed with the next steps:

3. Gather Information from multiple sources
4. Organize and analyze information
5. Make the assessment and determine whether intervention is needed

If case management or intervention is needed, the team will follow the remaining steps:

6. Develop and implement a plan for case management, intervention, and/or support
7. Monitor progress of case management plan / intervention plan and re-assess
8. For all cases, document steps taken by BTAM team and close the case when the team decides the level of concern is sufficiently low.

## The Goal of the BTAM Process

The primary goal of the behavioral threat assessment & management process is to prevent harm and to take efforts to enhance the safety & well-being of everyone involved, including the individual of concern, the situation, and the school.

It is important not to confuse tactics or tools (e.g., counseling, support, discipline, prosecution, dismissal, etc.) with goals or desired outcomes (i.e., enhance the safety and well-being of the situation). Instead of saying that “Our goal is to get the student into counseling”, it is more effective from a prevention standpoint to re-frame the discussion as “Our goal is to improve the safety and well-being of the situation. What tools or resources may help us? How will a referral to counseling help us move toward that goal? If counseling is not sufficient in this case, what other approaches may work? What do we do if those don’t appear to be working? In addition to intervening with the subject, what can we do to enhance the safety of others?”

Threat assessment & management is not an adversarial process and is most effective when it is not approached as adversarial. Many threats are a cry for help – and oftentimes those who engage in threatening behavior are seeking to be heard and understood (even if they are doing so in a way that is scaring others). While some of the ways the subject may be trying to address

a grievance may be inappropriate or threatening (and need to be addressed), their problems or concerns may be legitimate or may help us understand environmental or systemic issues (such as bullying, harassment, or bias) that are fueling their desperation or hopelessness. Using a holistic approach to try to understand what is driving or causing the threatening behavior can help a team identify the underlying problems or other factors the team can help solve or address, to get the person off the pathway to violence and onto a better path.

## Guiding Principles of Behavioral Threat Assessment & Management

Several principles guide the BTAM process<sup>1</sup>. They are helpful for threat assessment team members and practitioners to keep in mind as they follow the threat assessment process in any given case:

***Targeted violence is the end result of an understandable, and usually, discernible, process of thinking and behavior.***

Individuals who have committed targeted violence did not “just snap,” but engaged in a process of thought and behavior that escalated over days, weeks, months, and even years. That pre-attack behavior was often known to others or was potentially detectable.

***Targeted violence stems from an interaction among the Subject(s), Target(s), Environment and Precipitating Incidents (STEP).***

Identifying, gathering information, making an assessment, and intervening before harm occurs requires a focus on the four components below and their interaction:

- **Subject** of concern (i.e., the person that the team is assessing) - should provide insight into how the individual perceives and deals with conditions, often stressful, in their life and the intensity of effort they direct toward planning and preparation for violence.
- **Target** – examine access that the subject has to the target(s) and ways to decrease a target’s vulnerabilities; also examine the relationship between the target and subject and how the relationships dynamics may be influencing the subject's intended goals.

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<sup>1</sup> Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Behavior and Creating Safe School Climates. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education

- **Environment** - examines school/workplace climate and systemic issues that contribute to the risk of violence, or do not discourage it.
- **Precipitating events** - should examine critical stressors or events such as bullying, personal losses, enforcement actions, or even threat assessment team interventions, which may increase or decrease the risk for violence.

***An investigative, skeptical, inquisitive mindset is critical to successful threat assessment.***

Threat assessment team members should strive to be accurate, fair, and diligent in gathering data to identify consistencies and inconsistencies to gain understanding of the context and situation. It is important to be aware of personal biases that may impact accurate interpretation of data; thus team members must openly discuss differences in interpretation of the data and inconsistencies within the data.

***Effective assessment is based upon facts and observations of behavior, rather than on characteristics, traits, or profiles.***

Perpetrator “profiles” do not provide a reliable basis for making judgments of the threat posed by a particular individual. The threat assessment process examines the behavior of the subject in relation to the context, issues, challenges and resources involved. This provides for an individualized, holistic, and fact-based understanding of the situation.

***The central question in a threat assessment inquiry is whether a subject poses a threat (i.e., is building the capability to cause harm), not just whether the subject has made a threat (expressed intent to harm).***

Research on targeted violence in schools and workplaces has found that fewer than 20 percent of violent perpetrators communicated a threat directly to their target before the violence. In the majority of incidents of targeted violence, perpetrators did not directly threaten their targets, but communicated their intent and/or plans to others before violence. This indirect expression or third-party communication of intent to cause harm is often referred to as “leakage”. Individuals who are found to pose threats frequently do not make direct threats to their targets. The absence of a directly communicated threat

should not, by itself, cause a team to conclude that a subject does not pose a threat or danger to self or others. Subjects that potentially *pose* a threat often demonstrate pathway behaviors (see p. 13).

### ***Corroboration is critical***

It is important to keep in mind that a threat assessment case is an inquiry – meaning it’s a process designed to gather information and facts in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding about the person in question, his or her situation, setting, and potential targets. One hallmark of a good investigation is corroboration or fact-checking – that is, taking steps to confirm information from other sources.

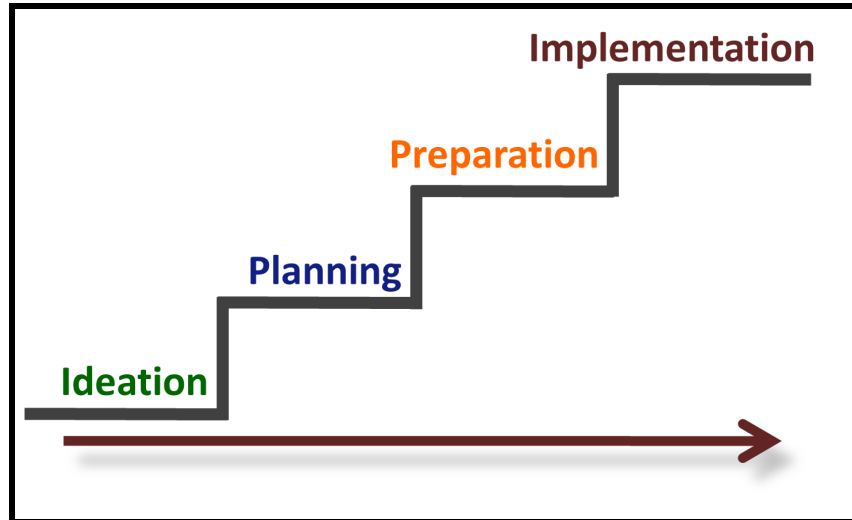
### ***An “integrated systems approach”, coordinating between local agencies and service systems within the school and the community (e.g., mental health services, law enforcement) should guide threat assessment and management processes.***

Relationships with agencies and service systems within the school (e.g., school psychologist, school counselor, school social worker, school-based mental health clinicians, administrators, disciplinary officers, human resources, etc.,) and community (e.g., mental health, juvenile justice, child welfare, law enforcement) are critical to identifying, assessing, and managing individuals who are on a path to carrying out an act of targeted violence.

Additional guiding principles can be found in Appendix B.

## **How Threat Assessment Works: Understanding the Pathway to Violence**

The following graphic illustrates the “pathway to violence” - that is, the progression of behavior taken by subjects before they have engaged in targeted violence: They start with an idea to do harm, develop a plan to carry it out, prepare by acquiring the means or capacity to do harm, and then implement the violent act. When a threat assessment team runs a threat assessment, they will gather information to determine whether the subject (i.e., the person they are assessing) is on a “pathway to violence” – and if so, why.



Ideation: Expressing thoughts or fantasies considering the use of violence to address a real or perceived grievance, threat, or provocation. Note that many people have occasional or fleeting thoughts of violence in response to perceived grievances. Most do not act on those thoughts or move forward along the pathway. Therefore, knowledge that someone is thinking about violence does not confirm that a danger exists but should orient us to the possibility, and that the subject is struggling with a grievance of some sort.

Planning: Giving thought and consideration not only to the idea of committing violence, but the who, what, when, where and how of doing so. Expressions may begin to reference timing, location, targets, means, methods, etc. The subject may seek out and gather information regarding their grievances, their targets, means of causing harm, equipment, etc.

Preparation: Beyond just acquiring weapons, this stage involves attempts to prepare for the violence and to develop or acquire the *means, method, opportunity, and/or proximity* to be able to harm the intended target(s)/victim(s). They obtain or try to obtain the means to fulfill their plans (e.g., weapons, tools, particular clothing, etc.) They may adjust plans as the subject encounters barriers or opportunities that support their fantasy and plans. Subjects may probe boundaries to practice accessing areas. Finally, much of targeted violence (though not all) occurs in relative proximity to targets.

Implementation: The subject initiates the operationalized plan once reaching a point where they perceive themselves as capable of doing so. Capability is based on the subject’s perceived skill (to cause harm) and desire to do so.

As a person moves along the pathway to violence, there may be an escalation in the rate of movement (i.e., a flurry of activity or energy burst), changes in the frequency of behaviors causing concern (e.g., a number of concerns over time), and/or a sudden change in patterns of behavior where someone “goes off the radar”. A BTAM team needs to check whether the concerning behavior has stopped, the subject has become more covert in their actions, and/or community members have stopped reporting concerns. In addition, the individual may return to an earlier step on the pathway (e.g., begin preparatory steps and return to planning to better refine the method). Regardless of where someone is on the pathway to violence (if they are on it), it is still possible to prevent harm with interventions that can get the person off the pathway to violence and onto a better path.

Research indicates that while targeted violence incidents are rarely spontaneous and impulsive, they can escalate rapidly from ideation through implementation. This may be expedited by a sense of desperation for resolution, lack of concern for consequences, or the influences of others encouraging escalation (e.g., through social media or direct communications). When there are indications that a subject may pose a threat to the school community, threat assessment teams will need to move quickly to inquire about and intervene in that planning or preparation.

### Implications for Prevention

Many school shootings and other acts of targeted violence are preventable. The challenge is that while there are usually pieces of the puzzle available, the information is likely to be scattered and fragmented. Confidential reporting procedures are critical so multi-disciplinary threat assessment teams can act quickly to assemble the facts to determine if the subject of concern is on the pathway to violence, and to work with them to solve underlying problems and move them away from thoughts/plans of violence.

# BUILDING A BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT (BTAM) PROGRAM

There are several considerations for establishing and operating a behavioral threat assessment and management team or program (BTAM team or BTAM program). This section includes general information that can be used to build a BTAM team or program in a K-12 school. Where relevant, this section also provides guidance specific to BTAM teams in PreK-12 schools.

## Components of a BTAM Program

The following basic components are recommended for BTAM programs in schools. While the primary component of any BTAM program is a BTAM team, listed below are other program components that can help a BTAM team operate efficiently and effectively<sup>2</sup>:

- Policies and procedures that define threats and other potentially dangerous behavior as well as how such behavior may be handled within the school.<sup>3</sup> Policies and related conduct handbooks should address employee behavior as well as student behavior.
- Multi-disciplinary threat assessment & management team (BTAM team). See section below on options for BTAM team /program structure
- Authority for the BTAM team to engage in the behavioral threat assessment & management process on behalf of the school.
- Training for the BTAM team and key gatekeepers on behavioral threat assessment & management procedures
- Multiple reporting channels or mechanisms (including optional anonymous reporting mechanisms), that can allow students, employees, and others to report threatening and troubling behavior to the BTAM team

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on school BTAM program components, please see Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W. & Reddy, M. (2002). Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education. And also, National Threat Assessment Center (2018). Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security. For more information on college/university BTAM program components, please see Deisinger, G., Randazzo, M., O'Neill, D. & Savage, J. (2008). The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment & Management Teams. Stoneham, MA: TSG Solutions Inc.

<sup>3</sup> Note that zero-tolerance policies and other policies that trigger automatic, severe disciplinary consequences are not recommended. Such policies can have an inadvertently chilling effect on the willingness of students, employees, and others to report threats and other behavioral concerns.



- Guidance to the school community on what types of behaviors and situations should be reported to the BTAM team, and how reports can be made (including any mechanisms for anonymous reporting, if available)
- Access to guidance from legal counsel about issues that may impact the work of the BTAM team, including:
  - Relevant laws and regulations, including special education policies and procedures
  - New developments from case law
  - Changes in regulations
  - Proposed legislation
  - Questions about FERPA and other information-sharing concerns
  - Case documentation
- Searchable database, spreadsheet, or a list to allow the BTAM team to quickly identify persons and/or situations that had been reported to the BTAM team previously.

The following sections offer more detail on some of these BTAM program components.<sup>4</sup>

## Developing and Operating BTAM Teams

### BTAM Team Membership

The primary component of a BTAM program is a multi-disciplinary threat assessment & management team (BTAM team). Involving members from an array of disciplines enhances the team’s ability to:

- Identify developing concerns/threats
- Gather information from multiple sources and organizational “silos”
- Maximize skills and resources to address concerns

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<sup>4</sup> More information is available in [Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Behavior and Creating Safe School Climates](#) and in [Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Approach: An Operational Guide to Preventing Targeted School Violence](#), as well as in other resources identified in Appendix E.

For more information regarding specific considerations when conducting a threat assessment involving students receiving special education services, read “[Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management \(BTAM\) Best Practice Considerations for K-12 Schools](#)” from the National Association of School Psychologists (2021).

- Monitor outcomes
- Enhance the school and district’s overall ability to:
  - Communicate (to, from & within the teams)
  - Collaborate (working together for the best awareness and outcomes)
  - Coordinate (engaging in purposeful planning and coordination of actions and interventions, within the team and with outside partners).

Each member of a school BTAM team should be aware of his/her role and responsibilities.

### *Membership, Roles and Responsibilities of School BTAM Teams*

Roles and responsibilities for school BTAM teams typically include:

#### **School administrator:**

- Consults with team members to screen cases and helps to determine when to conduct an initial screening and when appropriate to mobilize a full threat assessment inquiry
- Assists in having conversations with subjects of concern, targets, witnesses, teachers, staff, parents, students
- Assists in gathering additional information (e.g., school records)
- Determines and enforces disciplinary consequences, if appropriate
- Ensures that any threat management plan is followed and monitored
- Works closely with the public information officer or communications director to respond to community concerns and questions

#### **School psychologist / social worker / counselor / other contracted mental health professional or entity:**

- Assists in having conversations with subjects of concern, targets, witnesses, teachers, staff, parents, students
- Serves as a liaison with mental health providers
- Advises the team on school-based and community interventions and supports, including possible mental health and behavioral assessments, where appropriate
- Assists with next steps and possible referrals
- Helps delivery services outlined in the management plan, if appropriate

**School Resource Officer (SRO):**

- Help with critical data collection, particularly social media
- Identify concurrent safety concerns in the community
- Provide information regarding prior involvement with law enforcement, as privacy guidelines allow
- Assists in conducting interviews of subjects, targets, witnesses, teachers, staff, parents, and students
- Assists with efforts to ensure safety and security (e.g., provide safety escorts/increased supervision to-from school, in hallways, and common areas; work with local law enforcement to ensure community safety after school hours)
- Conducts independent criminal investigations, as needed and appropriate
- Serves as a liaison with law enforcement, court personnel, juvenile justice, probation, etc.; to help students onto a more positive pathway
- Provide mentoring and community supports
- Uses discretion to determine the need for welfare checks, weapons checks, and home searches, where permissible
- Assists with next steps and possible referrals

**Special Education personnel:**

- Must be engaged as a BTAM team member if student receiving special education services
- Assist with screening cases that involve students receiving special education services.
- Assist in reviewing information and making assessments in cases that involve students receiving special education services.
- Assist in developing, implementing, and monitoring intervention plans in cases that involve students receiving special education services.
- Ensures special education protocols and procedures are followed if a manifestation determination review and/or changes in placement or programming are warranted

Other considerations for membership include persons with expertise in:

Human Resources, (informed on personnel policy and practices)

Legal Counsel (as a legal advisor)

*Ad hoc* members (e.g., Special Education personnel for students not receiving special education services, behavior interventionist, school nurse)

IT, Public Relations/Communications, Head of Transportation, Head of Food Services, Head of Custodial

Key Gatekeepers such as someone from the school, (e.g., teacher, counselor, coach, other school employee) or community (e.g., probation officer, social service worker) who may know or have knowledge of the subject or have special expertise to help the team deal with an issue.

Finally, the team should consider having access to external consultants as needed, including:

- 1) **threat management specialist(s)** who has the relevant education, training, and experience to assist with the inquiry, assessment and management of challenging cases, to coach and ensure consistency of process, to assist with continual improvement of the process, and to sustain training of team members; and
- 2) an **independent medical/psychological evaluator (IME)** who has the relevant education, training, and experience to conduct clinical violence risk assessments when necessary. It is best to have a pre-established relationship with at least one, and preferably two qualified evaluators. Having a pre-established relationship allows better opportunity to vet potential providers (to ensure their competence and experience), to understand costs and process for assessments, and for them to understand the needs and resources of your organization, in addition to appropriate sharing of information with appropriate consent.

External consultants do NOT replace the school BTAM process but provide additional data and expertise to help guide the school/district BTAM process.

### Maximizing the Effectiveness of a BTAM Team

Team membership should not be viewed only in terms of what positions or offices are represented on the team. Team membership can also factor in which types of individuals may be best suited to serve on a BTAM teams.

In choosing team members, team functioning is enhanced if BTAM team members exhibit the following skills and attributes:

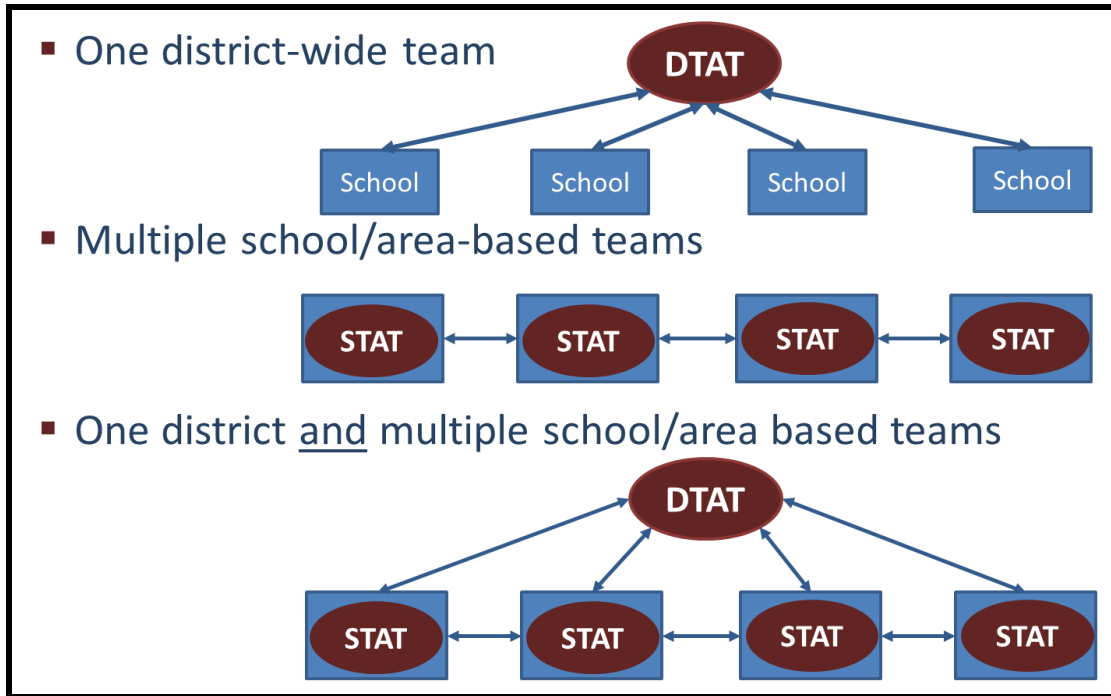
- are passionate about the goals of the team – who believe prevention is possible
- are familiar with – and trained in -- threat assessment principles and practices
- are inquisitive and can have a skeptical mindset for work on the team
- exercise good sense of judgment, and who are objective and thorough
- relate well with others and can work well in a group
- are willing to evaluate and minimize impact of bias

- can advocate for necessary resources – for the team and for individuals of concern
- leadership skills to effectively lead team discussions and keep the team on track (team leader)

## BTAM Program Structure – Options for PreK-12 Schools

Schools and school districts can structure their BTAM team(s) to meet their needs and based on the number of schools involved as well as resources available. There are several options for building a BTAM program in PreK-12 schools or districts:

- **One District-Wide Team:** Districts may opt to operate one BTAM team to serve all schools within the district. Districts that have only one BTAM team may also choose to operate small screening teams in each school within the district. A school-based screening team can screen cases from that school to determine which situations to refer to the district BTAM team.
- **Multiple School / Area-Based Teams.** The district may opt to develop teams for each school or for groups of schools (by geographic area, grade level, function, etc.).
- **District-Level Team and Multiple School-/Area-Based Teams.** The district may have one central team that provides oversight, consistency, and accountability for all BTAM processes (and manages threats impacting the whole district), as well as individual school/area teams that address cases in their respective areas of responsibility, with all information shared with the central team.
- Or a combination of these options.
- Finally, smaller districts, or those not well resourced, may opt to build a regional team as a resource for all schools in the service area.



DTAT=Division/District Threat Assessment Team

STAT=School Threat Assessment Team

### Resources and Approaches to Increase Team Effectiveness

BTAM teams can work proactively to develop, research, implement, and enhance other resources that can help the BTAM process work more effectively. Considerations include:

- Identify and list local resources (school-based, campus-based, and/or community-based): community mental health services, child protective services, law enforcement crisis response units, emergency psychiatric screening services, etc.
- Establish liaisons with community resources and secure access (including after-hours): Proactively build relationships and update information yearly.
- Develop relationships with other school districts, be familiar with what other regional school districts do for their threat management programs. The team’s next case may be the last one from another school district!
- Identify state-level resources: Guidance and technical assistance from state board of education, school board association, union, state center for school safety, law enforcement fusion center.
- Identify potential subject matter expertise: What resources does the team have access to regarding implications when disabilities are present, independent violent risk assessments, tracking social media threats, etc.

- Access to informed/relevant legal counsel input (e.g., on questions such as FERPA exceptions, compliance with legal requirements). We recommend consulting with legal counsel when establishing BTAM policies and protocols, including mechanisms for documenting cases.

## Encouraging People to Report Threats/Concerns: Overcoming the Bystander Effect

Identification depends, in large part, upon the willingness and ability of the school community or campus community to overcome the “bystander effect” and report concerns.

To help bystanders be more actively engaged in supporting the safety and well-being of the school, members of the community need to know:

- **It is everyone’s role and responsibility to share concerns.**  
Everyone has a role to recognize concerns, respond in a helpful manner, and to report concerns to persons who can best help the situation.
- **What to report.**  
While there is no one list of THE behaviors that may cause concern, providing examples of concerns that the team can assist with, will help community members better recognize, respond and report concerns appropriately.
- **Where (and with whom) to report.**  
Community members need to know where, how and with whom they should share concerns. It can be helpful for schools to have multiple mechanisms to foster reporting and awareness of concerns. Students, in particular, need awareness training, in addition to specific instruction and support, on how to utilize the reporting avenues to get help (i.e., They are not “narking”, but they are getting help for someone and that is ok’.)

Multiple reporting mechanisms should be considered. Schools should consider websites, emails, anonymous tip lines, drop boxes, QR codes or other reporting options. These reporting mechanisms should be checked on a regular basis and limitations fully disclosed (i.e. only monitored during 7am-7pm) with alternatives provided to address the limitation.

- **Reports are wanted.**  
All community members need to know that reports are welcomed, even if the situation is determined not to be a threat.

- **Something will be done.**  
The school community is more likely to come forward when anonymity is respected, and concerns will be addressed in a responsible and fair manner.
- **Regular reminders of issues and process**  
Schools can experience great mobility amongst staff and students, thus ongoing training and education needs to be ongoing throughout the year.

### Guidance on What Should be Reported

Any information that is concerning, troubling, or upsetting needs to be reported. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Threatening statements, gestures, and/or artistic impressions.
- Persons with ongoing, unresolved grievances with a member of the school community
- Unusual or bizarre communications or behavior
- Information about someone expressing thoughts, plans or preparations for violence
- Concerns that someone may harm themselves
- Behavior that significantly disrupts the learning or working environment
- Behavior that seems troubling or disturbing
- Persons seeming isolated and alienated from others
- Anyone unknown to the school
- Anything out of the ordinary that raises concern about safety

### Reporting Sources

The team may consider establishing liaisons with groups outside of school to educate them about the threat assessment team and encourage sharing of concerning information. Be sure to provide access to mechanisms that allow for **anonymous reporting**.





This diagram shows examples of various sectors and sources of information – in school and outside of school– that may report concerns to the threat assessment team.

In the graphic above, all the communication pathways are bi-directional to represent the potential involvement of all these entities in continued engagement in and support of the behavioral threat assessment and management process. This is not to say that the team discloses all aspects of the case to those outside the team, but rather that the team discloses information (within the limits of law and professional ethics) based on what those persons have a need to know, to support the safety and well-being of the situation.

Encouraging reporting can be accomplished through various mechanisms such as general awareness training for the entire school, providing multiple ways to report a concern to the team, and notification to parents.

### Regular Awareness and Reminders of the Process

Administrators, BTAM team members, and key gatekeepers should regularly seek opportunities to build awareness of, and engagement with, the BTAM process. Examples of strategies to support this effort include:

- **Outreach/Awareness presentations**
  - Administration
  - Staff \*include front office, coaches (even part time), music/band directors, substitute teachers, bus drivers, food service workers, custodians, landscapers)
  - Students (\*awareness training needs to be age appropriate and reinforced throughout the year)
  - Parents
  - Contractors/Vendors
  - Community groups/organizations
  - School / campus neighbors
- **Training Sessions**
  - Behaviors to report
  - Reporting & case management process
  - Verbal de-escalation
  - Incident survival & response
- **Information: Available and sustained**
  - Website
  - Mobile Apps
  - Newsletters / email
  - Social Media
  - Trusted adults
  - Others....

## Building a Positive School Climate

Threat assessment teams work best in schools that have an overall positive or safe climate –, where students and employees feel respected and feel that situations are handled fairly, and that negative behaviors (e.g., bullying) are addressed quickly.

Schools can enhance their overall climate by surveying everyone in school – students, staff, parents – to see how safe and respectful the school feels to them. The school can then use the

findings to make changes to improve how safe (physical safety) and respectful the school feels (psychological safety).

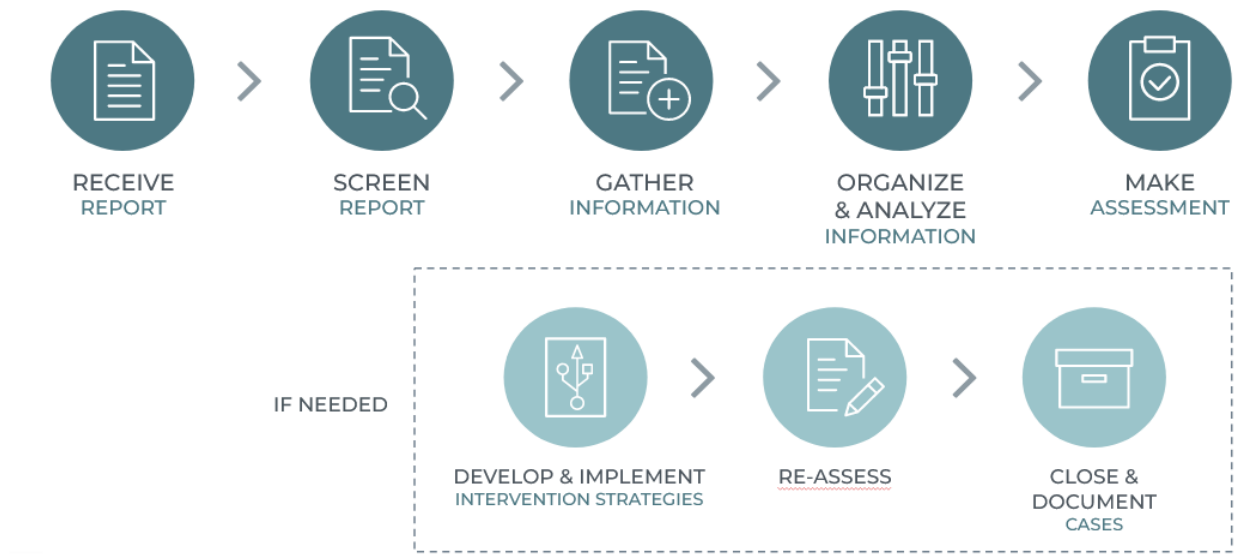
Connection through human relationships is a central component to a culture of safety and respect. Schools should strive to build climates where students have a positive connection to each other, and at least one adult. Adults provide a safe place for students to share concerns openly and without fear of shame or reprisal.

Supportive adults can include teachers, deans, secretaries, coaches, custodians, school mental health professionals, nurses, school safety officers, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, principals, and other support staff. For example, during staff meetings in one school district, the names of students are posted, and school faculty members are asked to put stars next to the names of those students with whom they have a trusting relationship or know best. Staff members then focus on establishing relationships with those students with few to no stars next to their names – i.e., those students with the fewest adult connections in the school. This is a small and easy way to help improve connectedness in a school.

# STEP-BY-STEP BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT PROCESS

## Synopsis of the BTAM Process

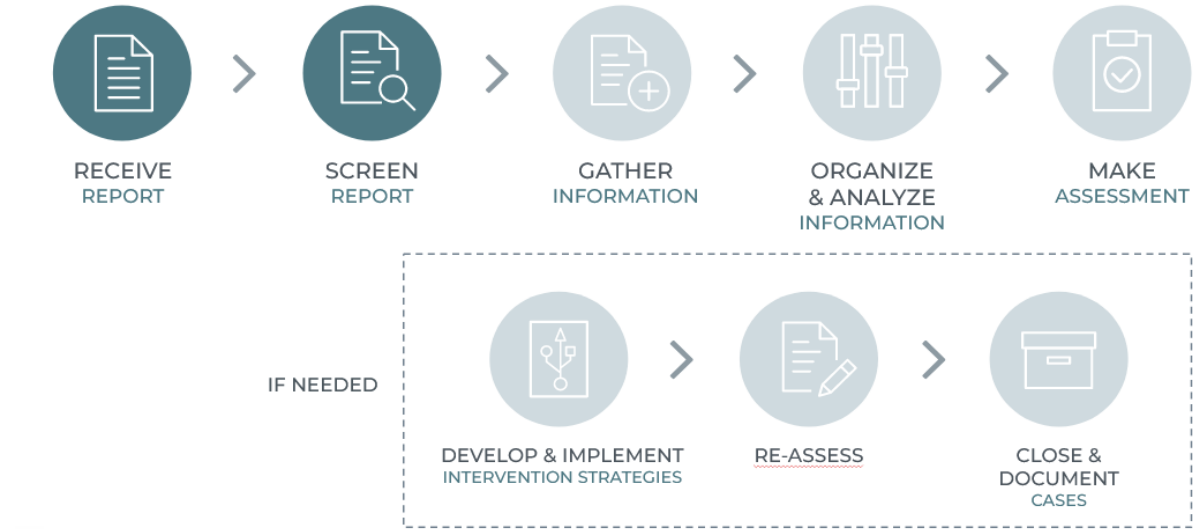
### Threat assessment process



When a threat or other troubling behavior is reported to a BTAM team, below are the steps that BTAM teams should follow to complete the BTAM process. The graphic provides a visual representation of the BTAM process. The following sections provide more detail on each step in the process.

## Step 1: Receive a Report of Concern

### Threat assessment process



When a BTAM team first learns of a new report of a threat or other troubling behavior, the team (or one member of team) should collect initial intake information about the behavior, the Concerning Person (i.e., the person who engaged in the threatening behavior; the person to be assessed), and other information that is readily available, including (but not limited to):

- Initial Report (what is the threatening behavior, when did it occur, etc.)
- Name of the Reporting Party / Witnesses
- Any weapons involved/threatened
- Details about concerns and any relevant background about situation
- Name of Concerning Person (i.e., the person to be assessed)
- Any Identified/Identifiable Targets

## Step 2: Screen the Case (Do you need to run a threat assessment?)

Typically, when a BTAM team learns about a threat or other troubling behavior, the team will screen the report to determine whether they should run a threat assessment. Based on the initial report(s) and a quick review of readily-available information, the BTAM team (or a subset) should **first** screen the case for two primary elements:

(1) Is there imminent danger or an emergency?

And

(2) Is there a need to run a threat assessment?

BTAM teams can do additional screening in situations where the Concerning Person is a student who is receiving special education support and/or has a 504 plan, individualized education plan (IEP), or functional behavioral assessment plan. In those situations, if the behavior reported to the BTAM team is already part of known baseline behavior or is already being managed under the student's IEP, 504 plan, or FBA plan, then the BTAM team can notify special education personnel of the reported behavior and does not need to run a threat assessment. If the behavior is not consistent with baseline behaviors and/or is not able to be effectively managed through current programming, then a threat assessment would need to be conducted. A special education representative (i.e. school psychologist and/or special education case manager) must be part of the BTAM team and engage in the BTAM process.

The purpose of screening is to determine if immediate action is needed (in situations where there is an emergency) and then to determine if a threat assessment is needed. The additional screening for situations involving students receiving special education services are to ensure that such students are not disproportionately referred for threat assessments.

For all screening questions, BTAM teams can choose the exact language to use – based on the BTAM team's scope and other factors. We offer sample screening questions below, for consideration.

### Screen for Imminent Danger / Emergency (Sample Question)

- (1) Does the matter require immediate police response? Is there imminent danger to person or place?
  - a. If yes, follow emergency protocols and, when it is safe to do so, run a threat assessment.
  - b. If no, answer additional Screening question 2.

## Screen for Running a Threat Assessment (Sample Question)

(2) Based on the initial report, is there a need to run a threat assessment? *Answer each of the following questions, based upon the initial report:*

(2a) Has the person threatened violence or made any other communications about intent or plans for violence?

Yes

No

(2b) Have other behaviors raised concern about violence to others/self & others, such as sexual assault, dating violence, stalking/cyberstalking, domestic violence assault. (\*If any of these behaviors are present, please notify the Title IX Coordinator.)

Yes

No

(2c) Is there a fearful victim or third party (e.g., someone who is taking protective action) or is someone concerned about the behavior?

Yes

No

(2d) Are there unanswered questions or another reason to run a threat assessment?

Yes

No

If NO to ALL parts of Question 2 (Question 2a, 2b, 2c, AND 2d), document your responses and close the case.

If YES to ANY part of Question 2 (Question 2a, 2b, 2c, OR 2d), answer the following question:

3). Is the student known to have a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)/Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), 504 Plan, Individualized Education Program (IEP), and/or health plan?

Yes

No

If NO, run a Threat Assessment.

If YES, immediately notify SPED personnel involved and answer Question 3a).

## Additional Screening for Students Receiving Special Education Services (Sample Questions)

(3a). Is the threatening behavior a known baseline behavior?

- Yes
- No

If NO, run a Threat Assessment.

If YES, answer Question 3b)

(3b). Can the threatening behavior be managed under existing FBA/BIP/IEP/504 Plan?

- Yes
- No

If NO, run a Threat Assessment.

If YES, refer to SPED/504 personnel, then document and close the matter.

### **FINAL DETERMINATION: Is there a need to conduct a threat assessment?**

- Yes
- No

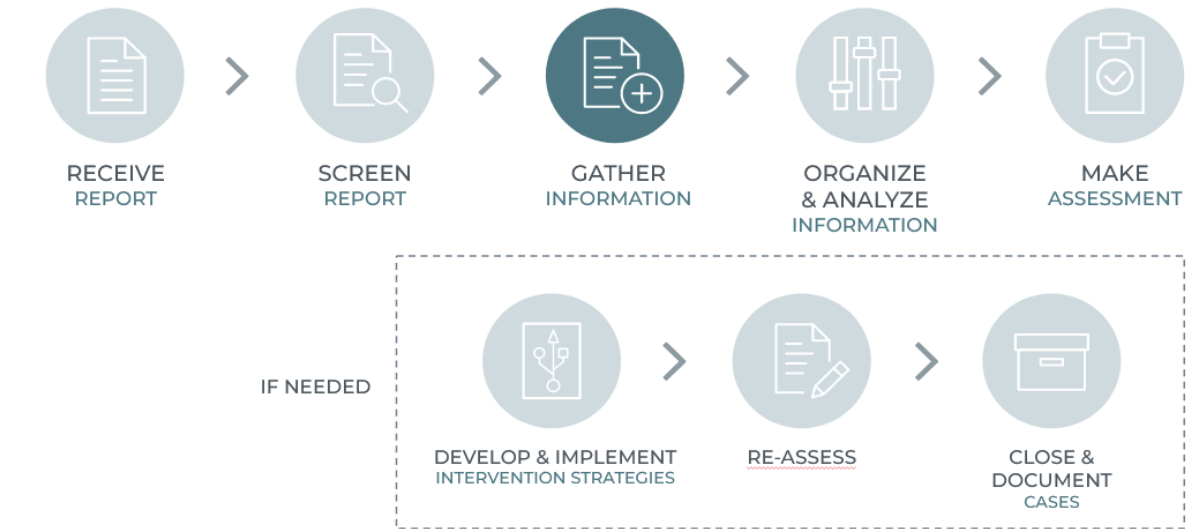
If YES, run a threat assessment. Proceed to the next step in the BTAM process: *Gather Information from Multiple Sources* (see Step 3 below)

If NO, complete documentation of the screening process, make any necessary notifications (per school policy), and close the matter.



### Step 3: Gather Information from Multiple Sources

## Threat assessment process



When a BTAM team conducts a threat assessment, the team should seek information from all identifiable persons and sources that may have any information about the Concerning Person or situation in question. A key component of effective threat assessment is seeking information from multiple sources beyond the BTAM team itself – and not rely just on what the BTAM team members may happen to know about the Concerning Person or situation.

Effective behavioral threat assessment and management involves a holistic approach to understanding and managing the concerning situation. The team will consider four domains that impact the assessment and management of cases:

- S** Is the **Subject** (i.e. the Concerning Person) engaging in behavior(s) causing concerns for violence, harm, or significant disruption?
- T** Are **Targets** vulnerable, impacted, or taking protective actions as if there are concerns for violence or significant disruption?
- E** Are there **Environmental/systemic** issues impacting the situation?
- P** Are there reasonably foreseeable **Precipitating events** that may escalate the situation?

We use the acronym “STEP” to make these domains easy to remember.

# Gather information



SEEK OUT INFORMATION FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES ABOUT THE PERSON AND HIS/HER SITUATION

## Who might have information?

- Teachers / Administrators
- School Staff
- Coach / Employer
- Parents
- Social media sites / Internet
- Local law enforcement
- After-school / weekend programs
- Community-level entities
- Person of concern
- Others?



Data sources to consider should include information from multiple sources, such as:

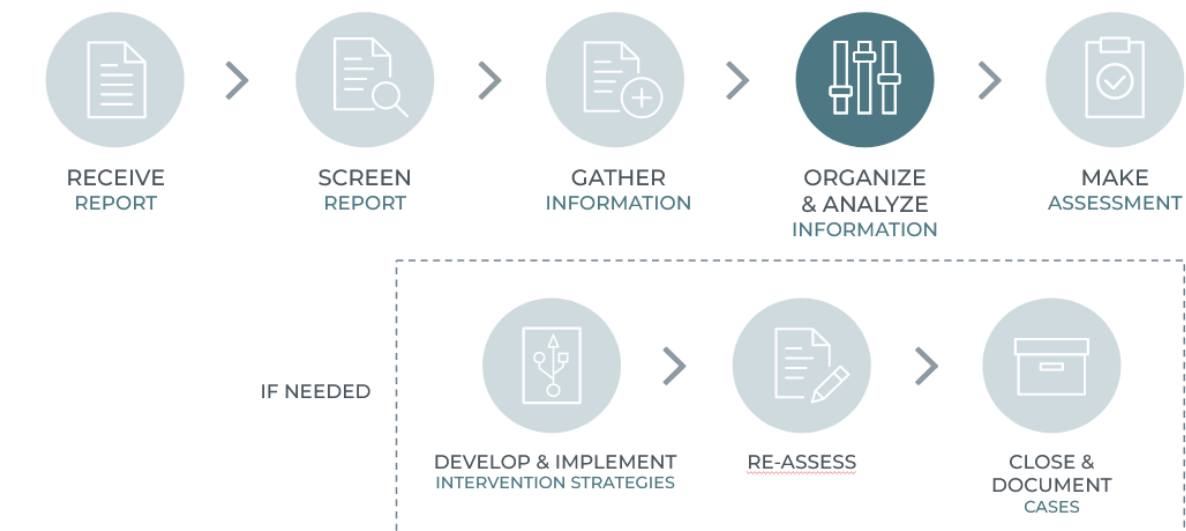
- Teachers/Administrators
- School Staff
- Coach/Employer
- Parents
- Social media sites/Internet
- Local law enforcement
- After-school/weekend programs
- Community-level entities
- Person of concern
- Prior BTAM team contact(s)
- Recent (and historical) work or school performance history
- Special education records
- Disciplinary or personnel actions
- Law enforcement or security contacts at school and in the community
- Prior critical involvement with mental health or social services
- Presence of known problems, grievances, or losses
- Current or historical grievances that may be related to the behavior of concern
- Online searches: internet, social media, email, etc.

- Others?

It is important to recognize that violence is a dynamic process that stems from interaction between the person, their situation, and their setting. Teams should avoid reliance on single factors and instead utilize multiple collateral data sources. It is always best to try and go to the original source (first-hand knowledge) and also to verify the credibility of the source/reports. Teams must also anticipate and assess the impact of the investigative process on the person and his/her situation.

#### Step 4: Organize and Analyze Available Information

### Threat assessment process



After gathering information from multiple sources, a BTAM team should organize and analyze the information obtained by answering the following key investigative questions (also referred to as areas of investigation). The key investigative questions come primarily from the school

threat assessment model created by the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education and are detailed in best-practice resources.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

**NOTE:** BTAM teams can always ask and discuss other questions in addition to the Key Investigative Questions listed here and the Assessment Questions listed in the next subsection. But for consistency and to be in alignment with current best practice utilizing the NTAC model, BTAM teams should use the Key Investigative Questions and the Assessment Questions to guide decisions regarding risk.

### *Key Investigative Questions / Areas for Inquiry*

The following are key investigative questions that the BTAM team should answer about the subject of concern and situation (also referred to as areas for inquiry and investigation) when they meet to discuss all the data gathered. These questions are not intended to be asked to the Concerning Person (i.e., the person who is being assessed) directly, although variation in wording can allow for each of these areas to be further explored when having conversations with the subject of concern and others (see Appendix C for additional guidance regarding how to structure interview questions). After information is gathered, the BTAM team will review the totality of the information available, then discuss the key investigative questions below to organize and analyze the information obtained. The BTAM team will do this before proceeding to make an assessment (covered in the next subsection).

#### **1. What first brought the Concerning Person to the team’s attention? What are their motive(s) and goals?**

- What behaviors are causing concern for or about the Concerning Person?
- Does the situation or circumstance that led to these statements or actions still exist?
- What efforts have been made to resolve the problem and what has been the result?

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<sup>5</sup> Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W. & Reddy, M. (2002). Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>6</sup> National Threat Assessment Center (2018). Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security.

<sup>7</sup> Deisinger, G., Randazzo, M., O’Neill, D. & Savage, J. (2008). The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment & Management Teams. Stoneham, MA: TSG Solutions Inc.

- Does the Concerning Person feel that any part of the problem is resolved or see any alternatives?
  - Has the Concerning Person previously come to someone's attention or raised concern in a way that suggested the Concerning Person needs intervention or supportive services?
2. **Have there been any communications from the Concerning Person suggesting ideas or intent to engage in violence?**
- Have there been concerning, unusual, threatening, or violent communications?
  - What, if anything, has the Concerning Person communicated to someone else (targets, friends, co-workers, others) or written in a diary, journal, email, social media, or website concerning his or her grievances, ideas and/or intentions?
  - Do the communications provide insight about motives/grievances, ideation, planning, preparation, timing, targets, etc.?
  - Has anyone been alerted or "warned away"?
3. **Has the Concerning Person shown any inappropriate interest in, fascination, and/or identification with:**
- Any incidents of mass or targeted violence (e.g., terrorism, rampage violence, school/workplace attacks, mass murderers, stalking, etc.)
  - Previous perpetrators of targeted violence / mass violence
  - Actions / behaviors of other perpetrators (e.g., weapons used, tactical gear used, specific components of a violent plan, writing a manifesto / keeping a journal of the planning)

- Identifying with the motives, grievances, and/or desperation of previous perpetrators
- Desire for fame or notoriety of previous perpetrators

**Note:** Having heightened interest in acts of violence does not necessarily indicate that the Concerning Person poses a threat or is otherwise in need of some assistance. Consider context, developmental age, and other factors that may contribute to perceived fascination or obsessive interest. However, if the Concerning Person shows some fascination or identification on any of these topics and has raised concern in other ways, such as by expressing an idea to do harm to others or self, recently obtaining a weapon, or showing helplessness or despair; the combination of these facts should increase the team’s concern about the Concerning Person.

**4. Has the Concerning Person engaged in attack-related behaviors (i.e., any behavior that moves an idea of harm forward toward actual harm)?**

Examples may include developing a detailed plan; researching prior acts of targeted violence; surveilling possible targets or locations for an attack; practicing with weapons; acquiring clothing to hide weapons; acquiring tactical gear or other preparatory materials; rehearsal of plan, etc.

- Development of a “legacy token” (term from FBI referencing a communication created by the Concerning Person and delivered (or staged for discovery) in which subject:
  - Claims credit for planning and acts, or
  - Articulates motivations and reasoning so others may understand grievances suffered, or
  - Perpetuates media coverage to enhance notoriety / infamy.
- Attack-related behaviors provide an indication of how far along the pathway the subject has progressed and may also help the team understand how quickly the subject is moving forward toward an attack — i.e., how imminent a threat there may be.
- Any movement further down the pathway to violence may be a serious indication of potential violence.

**5. Does the Concerning Person have (or are they developing) the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?**

- How organized is the Concerning Person's thinking and behavior?
  - Does the Concerning Person have the means (e.g., access to a weapon, tools, materials) to carry out an attack? Are they trying to get the means (e.g., weapons, tools, materials) to carry out an act of violence?
  - Have they developed the capability (skill and will) to cause harm?

**6. Is the Concerning Person experiencing hopelessness, desperation, and/or despair?**

- Has the Concerning Person experienced a recent failure, loss and/or loss of status or a relationship?
- Is the Concerning Person having significant difficulty coping with a stressful event?
- Has the Concerning Person engaged in behavior that suggests that he or she has considered ending their life?

Many persons who have engaged in significant acts of targeted violence have been despondent and/or suicidal prior to their attacks or at the time of their attacks, hoping to kill themselves or be killed by responding police. Note that most people who are feeling hopeless, desperate, or even suicidal will not pose a threat of harm to others. However, these people are still in need of assistance and intervention and a suicide risk assessment may also need to be conducted by a school/qualified mental health professional

- Are there indications of last resort behaviors (Increasing desperation or distress that presses the Concerning Person into violence as a position of last resort)? (Meloy, et al, 2011)
- Desperation, despair, or action imperative

- Lack of perceived alternatives

**7. Does the Concerning Person have a positive, trusting, sustained relationship with at least one responsible person?**

- Does the Concerning Person have at least one friend, colleague, family member, or other person that he or she trusts and can rely upon for support, guidance or assistance?
- Is that trusted person someone that would work collaboratively with the team for the well-being of the Concerning Person?
- Is the Concerning Person emotionally connected to other people or becoming more socially isolated?
- Is there a deterioration of support, increased withdrawal from, or isolation by prior support systems?

Being able to involve someone that the Concerning Person already trusts may serve as a strong protective factor. This means that a responsible person may already be a good influence on the Concerning Person. If the team decides that the subject in question poses a threat of harm, the team can solicit the help of this responsible person to assist in developing and implementing a management plan. The team should monitor the status of the relationship in case it should fall apart, and then become a potential risk factor for escalation.

**8. Does the Concerning Person see violence as an acceptable, desirable – or the only – way to solve a problem?**

- Does the Concerning Person have a major grievance or grudge? Against whom?
- Does the Concerning Person perceive any alternatives to violence to address their grievances?



- Does the setting around the Concerning Person (friends, family members, others) explicitly or implicitly support or endorse violence as a way of resolving problems or disputes?
- Has the Concerning Person been encouraged, challenged, or "dared" by others to engage in an act of violence?
- Has the Concerning Person expressed sentiments of finality or desperation to address grievances?

A “yes” to this question increases concern about the subject and should also lead the BTAM team to consider what options they may have for helping the subject begin to resolve their problems or improve their situation so that they no longer look toward violence as a solution.

**9. Are the Concerning Person’s version of events or “story” consistent with his or her actions?**

- Does information from collateral interviews and from the Concerning Person’s own behavior confirm or dispute what the Concerning Person says is going on and how they are dealing with it?
- Is there corroboration across sources or are the Concerning Person’s statements at odds with their actions?

**10. Are other people concerned about the Concerning Person’s potential for violence?**

- Are those who know the Concerning Person concerned about any of the following:
  - For the Concerning Person’s health/well-being (e.g., alcohol/drug use, mental health, suicidality, coping, loss)?
  - That the Concerning Person might act based on violent ideas, plans or preparations?

- About a specific target?
- Are persons around the Concerning Person engaging in protective actions (e.g., distancing, avoiding, minimizing conflict, etc.).

The BTAM team should recognize that some people — such as parents, significant others, or anyone else who is very close with the Concerning Person — may not see the potential for violence even if others do. Those in close relationships with a person may be too close to the person/situation to admit violence is possible or even likely.

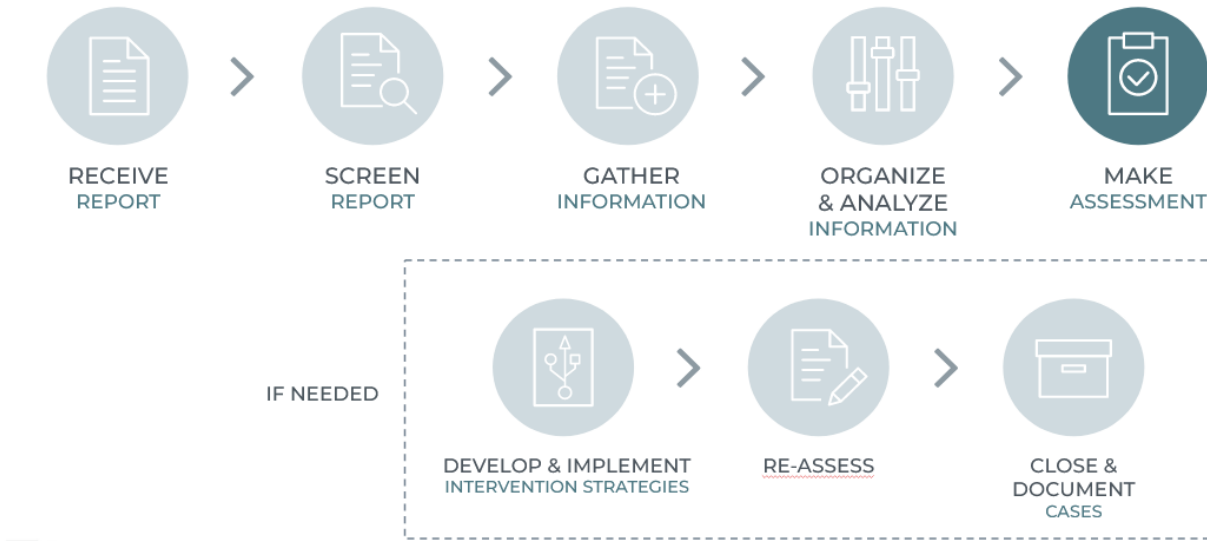
**11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood that the Concerning Person will engage in violence – either increase it or decrease it?**

- Are there precipitating events that may impact the situation currently and/or in the foreseeable future?
  - Are there improvements in the Concerning Person’s situation or developments that are making the Concerning Person more hopeful for the future?
  - Are prior interventions escalating, de-escalating, or having no effect on movement toward violence?
  - What is the response of others who know about the Concerning Person’s ideas or plans?
    - Actively discourage the Concerning Person from acting violently
    - Encourage the Concerning Person to engage in violence
    - Deny the possibility of violence, and/or
    - Passively collude with an attack, etc.

This question underscores the principle that violence risk is dynamic. By asking this question, the BTAM team can identify what factors in the person’s life might change in the near- to mid-term, and whether those changes could make things better or worse for the Concerning Person. Answers to this question can also provide some ideas for steps that can be taken in the event a case management or intervention plan is needed to reduce risk.

## Step 5: Make the Assessment

### Threat assessment process



Having analyzed the available information by answering the key investigative questions listed in Step 4, the BTAM team can now move on to making their assessment. To do so, the BTAM team will answer the Assessment Questions listed later in this section.

When making an assessment, BTAM teams should focus on the totality of the information gathered during the inquiry, and focus on behavior. BTAM teams should NOT focus on the Concerning Person's traits or characteristics, nor on how "similar" the Concerning Person may appear to previous attackers. When making an assessment, BTAM teams should

- Focus on the facts of the specific case.
- Focus on the Concerning Person's behavior rather than the subject's traits.
- Focus on understanding the context of behavior.
- Examine progression of behavior over time.
- Corroborate critical information.

## Answer the Assessment Questions

The assessment questions that follow are designed to provide the Team with a determination as to whether there is an actual threat or risk of violence posed.

### **1a) Does the Concerning Person pose a threat of violence to others? (Put another way, is the Concerning Person on a pathway to violence or is otherwise preparing for violence to others?)**

- If “yes”:
  - Develop, implement, and monitor an intervention plan to get the Concerning Person of concern off a pathway to violence and onto a better path.
  - Go to “Choose a Level of Concern” (below) then on to Step 6 to develop / implement an intervention or case management plan.
  - Skip remaining questions.
- If “no”:
  - Answer Question 1b below.

### **1b) Does the Concerning Person pose a threat of violence to self? (Put another way, is the Concerning Person on a pathway to potential self-harm?).**

- If “yes”
  - Follow the school’s protocols for conducting a suicide risk assessment
  - Go to “Choose a Level of Concern” (below) then on to Step 6 to develop / implement an intervention or case management plan to reduce risk of self-harm following the suicide risk assessment (or include details of plan created from the suicide risk assessment)
  - Skip remaining questions
- If “no”, answer Question 2 below.

### **2) If the Concerning Person does not pose a threat of violence to others or self at this time, does the Concerning Person show a need for some type of help or intervention, such as mental health care?**

- If “yes”, Go to “Choose a Level of Concern” (below) then on to Step 6 to develop / implement a case management plan or plan to refer the Concerning Person to the appropriate department(s).

- If “no”, the team can opt to monitor the matter for a period of time, then close the case - or may close the case (go to Step 8).

### *Choose a Level of Concern (optional)*

Once the team has answered the Assessment Questions, it can assign a Level of Concern to categorize how concerned the team is about the matter. The Level of Concern is NOT predictive of future violence but guides how directive and intensive the management plan must be. It is an optional component of the BTAM process but one that can help teams quickly identify which cases require the most care and concern. Using Levels of Concern can also help district personnel or others who may supervise a team to get a quick snapshot of what percentage of their cases are highly concerning versus lower-level concerns. Below is a sample list of levels of concern. Teams can also decide how many levels they want to use.

#### **Extreme Concern**

The team feels that the Concerning Person (i.e., the person they assessed) poses an immediate threat of violence to others and/or to themselves. The team should call 911 and activate their emergency protocols to contain the imminent threat as well as develop and implement a case management / intervention plan.

#### **High Concern**

The team feels that the Concerning Person (i.e., the person they assessed) poses a threat of violence to others and/or to themselves, although it does not appear to be imminent. The team should develop and implement a case management / intervention plan with safety measures and supervision being highly directive

#### **Moderate Concern**

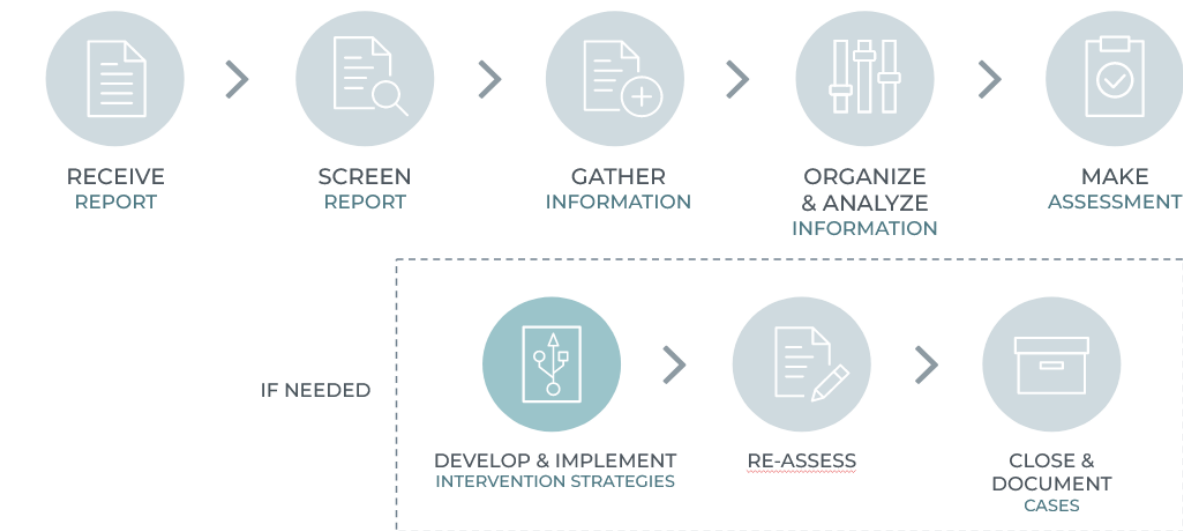
The team feels that the Concerning Person (i.e., the person they assessed) does NOT pose a threat of violence to others or to themselves; however, the team does feel that something needs to be done to provide assistance or support to the Concerning Person and/or to improve the situation so concerning behavior does not continue or repeat. The team should develop a case management and/or monitoring plan to provide this assistance and improve the situation.

**Low Concern / No Concern**

The team feels that the Concerning Person (i.e., the person they assessed) does NOT pose a threat of violence to others or to themselves. The team also feels the Concerning Person does not need any assistance or support, nor does anything need to be done to improve the situation. The team can close the matter or can opt to monitor the situation and check in at a later date before closing the case.

**Step 6: Develop and Implement a Case Management / Intervention Plan**

Threat assessment process



If the BTAM team’s assessment is that the Concerning Person poses a threat of violence to others (or to self, or both), the BTAM team should develop a coordinated case management plan to intervene and get the Concerning Person away from violence and onto a better path. The plan should be based on the facts of the case in question, and provide an integrated, coordinated response to the situation to enhance the safety and well-being of the subject of concern, the school, and others involved in the situation.

Most Concerning Persons who come to the attention of threat assessment teams are persons who are at a crisis point and are looking for assistance. Many have distanced themselves from others or feel alienated from others. They typically respond positively to someone who will hear their concerns, who will not over-react to emotional venting, who will engage in problem-solving, and who demonstrates care for them and their situation. Therefore, an

engagement model works well with the majority of cases, especially those involving internal threats. While this model often works well, there are some cases in which such direct engagement might inflame the situation. Therefore, each situation should be evaluated based on its own case facts in order to determine whether such direct follow-up would be appropriate.

BTAM teams should select intervention strategies with the greatest potential for addressing short-term crises as well as longer-term preventive power. While holding students and staff accountable for their actions, school administrators must be fair and reasonable in disciplinary responses. We recommend that BTAM teams work to use the least intrusive interventions that fit the needs of the case. It is important to keep in mind that not every case requires punishment, arrest or hospitalization. If the BTAM team determines punishment, arrest or hospitalization is necessary for safety/management, the management strategy should include reintegration strategies and/or coordination with the community.

Interventions that create distance (e.g., changes in class/work assignments, suspension, expulsion, termination) can make further assessment, intervention and monitoring difficult and may escalate the threat. Teams first need to consider “alternatives to suspension.” If suspension/expulsion cannot be avoided due to violation of district codes of conduct and/or state laws, BTAM teams should be mindful that when they are used, the team should consider how to convey consequences in a way that conveys concern and ensures monitoring (i.e. “consequences with care”). A student who is expelled, or a staff member who has been terminated, may conclude: "I have lost everything. I have only a short time to act. I will give them what they deserve." In addition, a student who is suspended or expelled is often under less supervision than if he or she were to remain in a school setting.

While that is not reason to withhold appropriate and fair consequences for inappropriate behavior, BTAM teams must consider and plan for those potential responses and still conduct the following:

- Connecting the person to resources that help to move the person away from thoughts & plans of, and capacity for, violence and/or disruption
- Mitigate organizational/systemic factors
- Monitor the person when they are no longer connected to the organization.

Use separation strategies with careful consideration of intentionality, awareness of limitations, and potential outcomes (positive and/or negative) related to these consequences.

Although detaining a Concerning Person may be necessary in a particular situation, without careful attention to the need for confinement, weapons removal, or interpersonal intervention, that action may be insufficient to prevent violence at school or otherwise protect a target. Similarly, referring a Concerning Person to the mental health system, without seeing that

referral in the context of an overall monitoring/management plan, may not be sufficient to prevent violence. Singular interventions tend to not be sufficient to address complex and on-going situations. Oftentimes family stressors are also revealed so consideration of family supports is often necessary to help mitigate risk.

When considering who will facilitate particular interventions, remember that personalities and chemistry matter and can impact the effect of the intervention. A given team member may be very skilled, but just not able to relate to certain Concerning Persons or targets. BTAM teams should work together for the best approach based on available resources, setting egos aside.

### Subject-Based Case Management Strategies

Following are considerations for the case management plan with a Concerning Person (i.e., the subject of concern):

- Check-in / Checkout to maintain channel of communication & engagement
  - Gather information
  - Build rapport and relationship
  - Decrease isolation
  - De-escalate volatile reactions
  - Provide feedback & mentoring
  - Monitor reactions to grievances, interventions and precipitating events
- Problem solving about legitimate grievances
- Parental / family involvement
- Referral for assistance or support services
  - Academic / work assistance
  - Accommodations
  - Alternative schooling / work
  - Social skills training
  - Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) instruction
  - Behavioral contracting
  - Modifications of student classroom assignment or schedule
  - Modification of work schedule or assignments
  - Involvement in extracurricular activities
  - Performance improvement plans
  - Peer coaching/mentoring
- Counseling/mental health services
  - Check-in/check-out with school counseling staff



- School-based mental health supports
- Outpatient counseling/mental health care
- Emergency psychiatric evaluation
- Disciplinary measures
  - Accountability through problems solving, restorative practices, and/or warning
  - Administrative orders for no contact or communication
  - Parental involvement
  - In school detention /after-school detention
  - In school / out of school suspension
  - Termination/expulsion
- Criminal Justice Services
  - Law enforcement / juvenile justice involvement
  - Court issued protective orders
  - Diversion programs

Utilize key relationships to engage with subject, target & witnesses

Engagement (communication, interaction and empathy) can help build key relationships with Concerning Person, targets and witnesses and can foster more effective:

- Information gathering and assessment
- Redirecting from violence / targets
- Problem solving / support
- Setting of boundaries / limitations
- Admonishment / confrontation
- Intervention / referral
- Monitoring
- Deterrence

Consider the goals for the engagement and use that to inform the best approach, by whom, when and where to engage.

## Involving Someone the Concerning Person/Target Trusts

A key to establishing an effective working relationship with the Concerning Person (as well as targets and witnesses) is to identify a responsible person they already trust. One key step to defusing a potentially violent situation involving someone with a grievance is to allow them to feel “heard” and validated. This can go a long way toward moving the Concerning Person away from thoughts and plans of violence.

Examples of a trusted ally include:

- BTAM Team member
- Teacher
- Academic advisor
- School counselor, school psychologist, school social worker
- School nurse
- Parent / family member
- SRO / Law enforcement officer
- Coach
- Outside counselor
- Pastor
- Other

If the BTAM team cannot find someone that the Concerning Person already trusts, they can use someone in the school or community who relates well with most people. In looking for someone to serve in this role, choose someone that most people get along with – the personality selection may matter more than that person’s job or role in the community or school.

## Target-Based Case Management Strategies

Where targets are identified or identifiable, consider ways to help them reduce their vulnerability to harm where possible. Consider things the target can do (or be coached or supported in) that increase their safety. Examples include:

- Establish/maintain/develop a relationship with all potential targets. Explain to them the importance of working with the threat assessment team to reduce risk.
- Setting clear limits and boundaries with Concerning Persons and all potential targets regarding communications and contacts
- Monitor communications for changes / escalations by the Concerning Person
- Avoid contact with or response to the Concerning Person – don't reinforce the Concerning Person's attempts to get a response
  - Document all contacts from/with subject
  - Maintain a log of contacts/communications from the Concerning Person noting date/time/means of contact, nature of contact, witnesses, and impact on the target (including any protective actions they have taken)
- Minimize reactivity to subject actions
- Minimize emotionally reactive responses that can satisfy, inflame or enrage the Concerning Person
- Minimize publicly available information especially with social media and phone (e.g., turn off location services within certain apps, turn off the "geotagging" feature which tells individuals where a person is when they take and post photos)
- Maintain/enhance situational awareness (hard to do when walking around looking at phone!)
- Vary routine – Be careful about consistent habits
- Develop contingency plans for escape, shelter, defense
- Utilize support systems – being/feeling like a target can be stressful. Use support systems/counseling and buddy systems.

## Organizational Strategies for Reducing Target Vulnerability

Consider things the school/organization can do that may increase target safety. Examples include:

- Engagement / liaison with Target – have a team member assigned as a point of contact for support and assistance
- Change work hours
- Change classroom location / locker location
- Change/enhance security in work location
- Notice to co-workers – Coworkers can help monitor if Concerning Person is present or posing a threat to target
- Security staffing
- Safety escorts
  - Increase target awareness to ensure they accurately understand the level of potential danger - provide feedback about concerns to help them understand risks to them and others.
  - Fear management - Sometimes victims are so debilitated by fear, they feel helpless and unable to take steps to help themselves - they need support, encouragement, and intervention.
  - EAP / Counseling referrals, if staff involved

### Systemic Case Management Strategies

Cases often help BTAM teams identify environmental or systemic problems that cause or adversely impact situations. As part of building a safe community, case management and intervention can also include necessary changes to a situation or the environment.

For example, a student may react inappropriately to poorly developed, burdensome, and/or inconsistently enforced procedures or policies. The student’s behavior must be addressed – but, if the procedure or policy tends to provoke discord because it is objectively unfair or unreasonable, that procedure or policy needs to be reviewed and potentially revised.

The BTAM team may have discovered a delay in reporting concerns, which was brought about by witnesses not knowing where or how to report concerns, indicating the need for additional awareness or training.

Sometimes situations escalate due to poor conflict management, lack of skills, and/or barriers to communication. Thus, BTAM teams may need to help leadership in the school or district to:

- Address systemic, policy, or procedural problems
- Address reporting gaps/delays
- Intervene with individuals that support violent behavior
- Enhance conflict management skills (e.g., de-escalation training for students and staff)
- Increase supervision & supervisory accountability
- Enhance positive organizational climate and culture
  - Emphasize fairness & respect
  - Ensure effective communication
  - Reward and support positive behaviors
  - Prevention & early intervention with inappropriate behaviors
  - Build engagement for mutual safety & well-being
  - Ensure fair and appropriate accountability

Threat assessment is only one component of an overall strategy to reduce school violence and can be implemented within the larger context of strategies to ensure schools are safe and secure environments. The principal objective of school violence-reduction strategies should be to create cultures and climates of safety, respect, and emotional support within the school. Several school safety strategies to support and enhance a positive school climate include:

- Effective communication among and between school staff, students and parents/guardians of students and community stakeholders will increase trust
- Social-emotional learning curriculums that promote acceptance, empathy, and the teach conflict resolution skills
- Strong, but caring, stance against the code of silence
- Bullying/harassment prevention and intervention
- School-law enforcement partnerships including well-trained school resource officers
- Collaborative relationships with mental health, social services, and other community-based resources

- Planning and preparation to deal with, respond to, and recover from potential crises
- Physical security measures utilizing crime prevention through environmental design

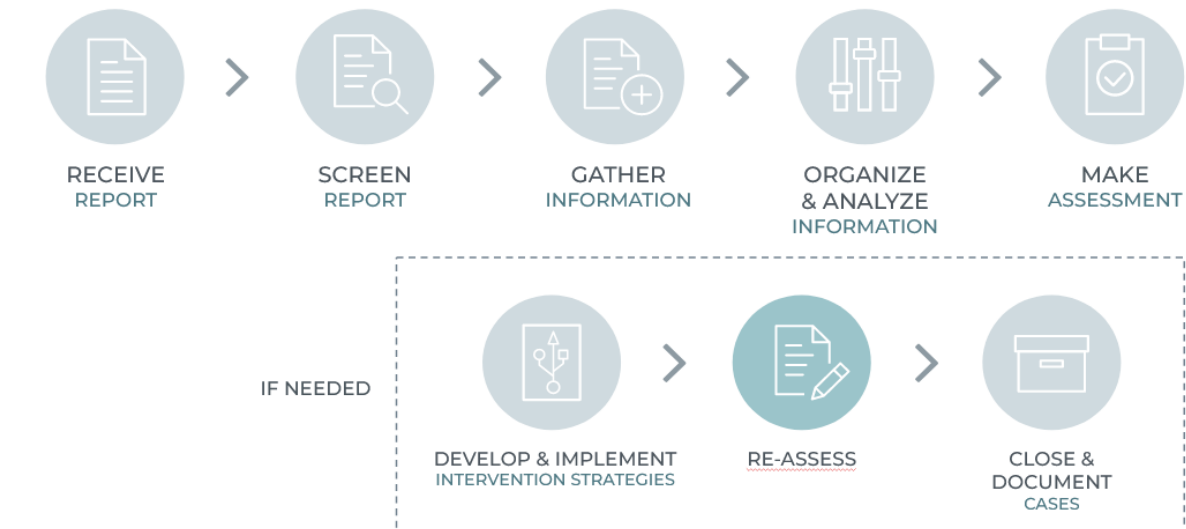
### Manage/Monitor Precipitating Events

As the case moves forward, other circumstances in the lives of the Concerning Person, targets and others (including the BTAM) may impact the case. Not all of these can be anticipated. However, when the team identifies potential precipitating events, they should build a plan to prevent or lessen their impact (when possible) or to at least monitor for their impact. Examples include:

- Minimize unnecessary precipitants where possible (i.e., individual and systemic challenges)
- Consider impact of timing and location of interventions
- Monitor & plan for loss / injustice
- Monitor & plan for key dates / events in the process of case management
  - Anniversaries
  - Hearings
  - Court dates
- Service of notice about outcomes
- Monitor for reactions to administrative/court actions
- Monitor reactions to case management/interventions
- Monitor for contagion effect of other high profile or locally significant acts of violence

## Step 7: Re-Assess (Case Monitoring)

### Threat assessment process



BTAM teams should continue to monitor the Concerning Person and situation until there is no longer concern about violence potential. For most situations, this will only be weeks and/or a few months. For situations of significant concern, reassessing may need to continue until the Concerning Person graduates, leaves the school, or moves away from the area; and they may also need to be transferred to a community-based threat assessment team (or the BTAM team can alert local law enforcement) if the Concerning Person leaves the school but still poses a threat of violence.

BTAM teams should ask:

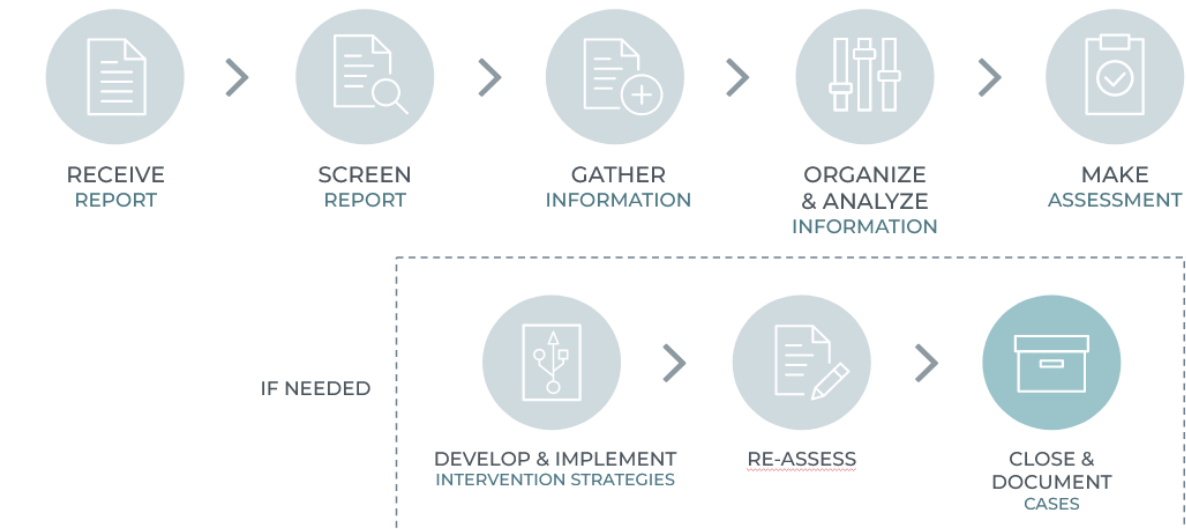
1. Is the management plan having the intended effect?
2. Are there any new problems/concerns the plan needs to address?

Re-assessing the person of concern should always include answering the assessment questions again.

If there are still concerns, a BTAM team needs to consider changing the case management plan, setting new goals, and/or setting more frequent Team meetings to re-assess and monitor progress. The team will continue to monitor, adjust plan, and re-assess as needed until there is no longer a concern of harm to self and/or others, and the individual is on a better pathway.

## Step 8: Document and Close the Case

### Threat assessment process



When the team’s assessment is that the Concerning Person no longer poses a threat of violence or self-harm, the team can close the case or place it on in-active status. The team should be sure to document the case, including scheduling any future dates to check-in or follow-up, if needed. The documentation should be stored in a confidential file, with only authorized personnel having access. If the Concerning Person changes schools, the BTAM team needs to consider, on a case-by-case basis, if information regarding the threat assessment(s) needs to be shared with the Concerning Person’s new school, ensuring all FERPA and HIPAA guidelines and exceptions to confidentiality are followed. BTAM teams should consult with legal counsel to determine whether and how to share information. Safety of all concerned is the primary consideration when determining if sharing information is appropriate. It is important to note when new information becomes available or if the situation changes, the BTAM team may need to re-engage or reopen the investigation. When closing and documenting the case, utilize language “based on the information we have at this time”.



## LEGAL ISSUES RELATED TO INFORMATION SHARING AND RECORD KEEPING

A broad range of legal issues can impact BTAM cases, including but not limited to:

- Constitutional protections on free speech, due process, search & seizure
- Civil rights concerns related to race, ethnicity, gender, disability, etc.
- State specific laws related to employment, privacy, record keeping, reporting/notification
- Privacy protections to include FERPA (Family Educational Rights Privacy Act) and HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), etc. – that protect student/client information.
- Disability regulations
- Employment standards, contracts, collective bargaining, policies
- Standards of care and negligence impacting tort liability

None of these interfere with a BTAM team being able to deal with threats impacting the school or workplace; however, some can be complex, and the guidance of legal counsel is strongly suggested.

Often, misunderstanding of the laws DOES impact willingness to report or respond effectively to concerns. Staff may not know when they can and cannot share information about a Concerning Person with the BTAM team. Thus, team members should have a working knowledge of foundational issues, exceptions to confidentiality, and access to legal counsel (with training and experience in the relevant bodies of law) to provide guidance.

### FERPA (Family Education Rights & Privacy Act) – Educational Records

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects the privacy of students' education records – but it also can lead to confusion about whether information about a student can be shared for the purposes of conducting a threat assessment. The U.S. Department of Education,

the entity that enforces FERPA, has published guidance on sharing information in threat assessment matters.<sup>8</sup> The key points are as follows:

- FERPA does not impede the work of a threat assessment team when handling any cases of threats or concern about potential violence or self-harm. However, misunderstanding of FERPA CAN impede threat management efforts.
- FERPA protects the privacy of information in a student’s educational records. It prohibits the inappropriate disclosure of student educational information beyond those who have a legitimate educational interest, i.e., a need to know.
- FERPA pertains only to the privacy of records; it does not extend to communications, observations, and other forms of information that team members may need to share. This means that team members are free to ask — and faculty and staff are free to share — their observations about a student, verbal communications with that student, and anything else not written down in educational records.
- FERPA allows sharing of information (within the school) with school officials having a legitimate educational interest. Information from an educational record can be shared with other school staff, who have a need to know to ensure safety and security. Certainly, a threat assessment team has a need to know! Schools must define who they consider to be a school official in their FERPA statement and should identify BTAM Team members as such school officials.
- FERPA also includes exceptions that allow information sharing in the case of emergency situations and/or situations where public safety is a concern. Guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education (which enforces FERPA) following the mass casualty incident at Virginia Tech has made clear that it is up to individual schools to decide whether there is an emergency or public safety concern. The team should articulate and document the nature of the emergency and/or threat to public safety, what information was shared, and how sharing of that information helped to address the safety concern.
- FERPA does not pertain to school law enforcement unit records (i.e., records created and maintained by & primarily for a law enforcement purpose). Records created and maintained under the umbrella of the institution’s school resource officer or other designated law enforcement entity would not be educational records, unless shared with school officials.

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<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Education (2021). *Does FERPA permit the sharing of education records with outside law enforcement officials, mental health officials, and other experts in the community who serve on a school’s threat assessment team?* Washington, D.C.: Author. Available at: <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/fag/does-ferpa-permit-sharing-education-records-outside-law-enforcement-officials-mental-health>

- FERPA allows for sharing of education records (and information from those records) when a student applies for enrollment or transfer. This allows for sharing of BTAM information between schools or schools/colleges, where there is an articulable need to know.
- The US Supreme Court has ruled that FERPA does not permit a private right of action, meaning that individuals cannot be sued for violations of FERPA. The law provides that federal funding could be withheld, or fines could be assessed in cases where a pattern or practice of violations is present (as opposed to isolated violations, which are not individually sanctionable). To date, there have been no instances where an institution has received such sanctions for violating FERPA regarding the sharing of information pertaining to school safety. Rather, it is more likely that an institution would receive a corrective notice, and additional training from the U.S. Department of Education if it were found to have shared information in violation of FERPA.

For more information, see [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) and search for FERPA or the Family Policy Compliance Office, which oversees FERPA. You can contact that office directly with questions. School mental health professionals (school psychologists, school counselors, school counselors) are typically covered under FERPA, particularly if their license to practice in schools is awarded by a state department of education or state department of public instruction. However, some may also be licensed or dually licensed by a state mental health licensing board. Thus, school mental health professionals need to check with their licensing boards and school district legal counsel for guidance if they are to be following FERPA and/or HIPAA privacy guidelines when serving on a school/district threat assessment team.

### Exercise about FERPA:

Consider the following to test your understanding of FERPA:

*A teacher approaches you (member of the BTAM team) very concerned about an interaction they just had with a student after a class. During that conversation the student engaged in behaviors and made statements that led the teacher to believe that the student was a serious threat to the safety of themselves and others at school.*

*Based on the information shared, you concur there appears to be a significant threat.*

*When you ask the name of the student, the teacher becomes very cautious and says they are not sure if they can provide that information, that they don't want to violate privacy law and be sued by the student's family.*

What misunderstandings, if any, are evident?

Answer:

1. The teacher's conversation with the student is not covered by FERPA as it is not an educational record. However, if the teacher wrote up an incident report that contained information that identified the student (or would reasonably identify them) then THAT report would likely be an educational record and subject to FERPA protections.
2. As a member of the BTAM team, you are a school official with a legitimate educational interest. The teacher can share any educational record with you that is pertinent to your duties.
3. The teacher articulated a public safety concern (and you concurred). This gives an articulable basis for sharing of information, including, if needed, to share information outside the school with those that can help prevent harm (e.g., parents, law enforcement, mental health). Note that, per FERPA, for such disclosures the school must document the disclosure, to whom it was made, and for what purposes.
4. There is no private right to action under FERPA. Neither you nor the teacher can be sued for an individual FERPA violation, EVEN IF, you had made a mistake.

## Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) – Medical & Mental Health Records

When it comes to accessing information that a health provider or mental health provider outside of the school settings may have about a subject, that information is generally more difficult to access than information protected by FERPA. Federal (e.g., HIPAA) and state laws, protect information shared between a doctor/therapist and patient, and limit information that can be lawfully shared with others. Keeping that information confidential helps patients trust their medical/mental health provider and disclose additional information to facilitate more effective treatment. We don't want to unduly compromise the safety that confidentiality provides. But serious safety concerns always supersede privacy concerns.

For school health professionals, HIPAA likely does not apply, as the records of school health services are more likely covered under FERPA, unless they involve treatment records. However, state medical records privacy laws likely impact what licensed health care providers in schools can share. The state privacy laws are generally consistent with HIPAA.

Again, consult with your legal counsel – but here is what our legal experts tell us about HIPAA and state confidentiality laws:

- HIPAA protects the confidentiality of information in health records. In addition, state laws also protect the confidentiality of mental health information and discussions between a patient and a mental health professional.

- HIPAA and state laws generally include exceptions where information can be shared in situations where a patient is a threat to themselves or others. In such situations where a mental health professional is aware that his/her patient has threatened harm to themselves or to someone else, the mental health professional may have a duty to warn someone or to do something to protect the victim in question.
- Under HIPAA and state laws, confidentiality is held by the client or patient, not the mental health professional. The threat assessment team can always ask the person in question for their permission to access their mental health records and talk with their mental health professional. If approached with sincerity for their well-being and assurance that the team can best help the person in question with full information, it is quite likely that the person will consent. The team will need to get the person's permission in writing (e.g., signed Release of Information).
- While HIPAA and state laws may prevent a mental health professional from disclosing information to the threat assessment team, it does not prohibit mental health professionals from receiving information about a patient. The BTAM team can provide the information it knows to an individual's therapist or counselor. In many cases, a treating mental health professional may only have partial information about a patient/client. Receiving information from the team about a particular individual may enhance the treatment that the mental health professional is able to provide.
- If the team provides information to a mental health professional, it can then ask the mental health professional whether the new information received from the team elevates their concern about the patient to the point where they now have a duty to warn or a duty to protect. If so, the mental health professional may be able to share information with the team.
- Finally, access to mental health information can be helpful in threat assessment cases, but it may not provide more detail than the team is able to access through others who know or have observed the person in question. It is more important to consider incorporating any treating mental health professional into an individual case management plan.

## Record Keeping

BTAM teams should document their behavioral threat assessment & management efforts through some forms of documentation. Above all, BTAM teams should seek guidance from the school or district's legal counsel to ensure that the team's efforts to document their cases meet the legal guidance provided to them. By maintaining records and preserving evidence throughout the behavioral threat assessment and management process, the team establishes a legal and behavioral justification for intervention. Teams are encouraged to retain records of

threat assessment and management cases as long as allowed under relevant laws or regulations regarding retention of such records. Individuals may pose an ongoing threat after leaving school, graduating, or losing employment.

## SUMMARY

Although no tool is foolproof, behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) procedures are recognized as the best available tool to address threatening behavior and enhance school safety. This guide was created to serve as a resource – regarding behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) -- for participants who have attended Vermont’s School Behavioral Threat Assessment & Management Training. Following training in school BTAM procedures, participants can refer back to this guide for ongoing support in their efforts to use the NTAC model of school threat assessment to enhance the safety and wellbeing of students and others who engage in threatening and other troubling behavior in schools. We encourage users to pursue training opportunities on a regular basis (e.g. annually) and to consult with BTAM experts when needed for assistance on complex cases.

# Appendices

## APPENDIX A: THE NATURE AND PROCESS OF TARGETED VIOLENCE

### Research on Targeted Violence in Schools<sup>9,10</sup>

Following the mass casualty incident at Columbine High School in April 1999, the US Secret Service and US Department of Education partnered to conduct research on mass shootings in schools in the US.

Because the study was prompted by the Columbine incident, and for purposes of research rigor, the study focused on mass shootings in which the perpetrator was a student or former student. This led some readers to (inaccurately) conclude that all school shooters were students. This was not the case then, nor is it now.

While students (or former students) are likely to represent the largest group of perpetrators, mass casualty incidents are also conducted by teachers, staff, administrators, and parents.

Additionally, some perpetrators are not directly affiliated with the schools where violence occurs but may be (or have been) in relationships with teachers, staff or students – i.e., domestic/dating violence that occurs within the school or during a school activity. Some are contractors or vendors or visitors that are provided access to schools or workplaces, without knowledge of their predatory interests or intent.

And finally, a small set of perpetrators have no relationship to the school at all. The school is chosen because it is accessible to the perpetrator, provides victims relevant to the goals of the perpetrator, or holds some particular meaning or significance to the perpetrator.

A similar replication study was published in 2019 by the National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC). NTAC studied 41 attacks against K-12 schools in the US from 2008-2017. The findings were very consistent with the 2002 findings. The findings are summarized below.

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<sup>9</sup> These findings come from Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R. & Modzeleski, W. (2002). The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative. Washington, DC.

<sup>10</sup> Protecting America's Schools. A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence (2019). Washington, D.C.



## Findings of the Safe School Initiative:

### **Acts of targeted violence are rarely impulsive.**

These attackers typically don't "just snap." Even though the media has often described these attacks as occurring "out of the blue," in reality, they do not. Instead, the subjects think about and plan their violent acts in advance – sometimes a few days in advance, sometimes over a year in advance.

The attacks appeared to be the end result of a comprehensible process of thinking and behavior: behavior that typically began with an idea, progressed to the development of a plan, moved on to securing the means to carry out the plan and culminated in an attack. This is a process that potentially may be knowable or discernible from the attacker's behaviors and communications.

### **Prior to the attacks, others usually knew aspects of subject's grievances, ideas, plans or preparations.**

In most cases (75%+), other people knew about the attack before it took place. In one incident, for example, the attacker had planned to shoot students in the lobby of his school prior to the beginning of the school day. He told two friends exactly what he had planned and asked three others to meet him that morning in the mezzanine overlooking the lobby, ostensibly so that these students would be out of harm's way. On most mornings, usually only a few students would congregate on the mezzanine before the school day began. However, by the time the attacker arrived at school on the morning of the attack, word about what was going to happen had spread to such an extent that 24 students were on the mezzanine waiting for the attack to begin. One student who knew the attack was to occur brought a camera so that he could take pictures of the event.

This finding suggests that students and other peers can be an important part of prevention efforts. A friend or schoolmate may be the first person to hear that a subject is thinking about or planning to harm someone. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, those who have information about a potential incident of targeted school violence may not alert an adult on their own. Schools must encourage students/staff to report this information in part by identifying and breaking down barriers in the school environment that inadvertently may discourage witnesses from coming forward with this information. Schools also may benefit from ensuring they have a fair, thoughtful and effective system to respond to whatever information witnesses do bring forward. If students have concerns that adults will react negatively to information they bring forward, they may be even less inclined to volunteer such information.

The 2019 study also found that most of the attackers had multiple motives, the most common being a grievance with a classmate(s), followed by school staff, romantic relationship, and/or personal issues. In addition, all experienced social stressors involving relationships w/ peers or romantic partners.

### **Most subjects did not threaten the targets directly.**

The majority of the attackers in the targeted school violence incidents examined under the Safe School Initiative did not communicate threats to their target(s) beforehand - whether direct (“I will kill YOU”), indirect (“You won’t want to be here next Tuesday”; said to a third party), or conditional (“If you don’t give me a decent performance evaluation, I will \_\_\_\_\_”) language prior to the attack. This finding underscores the importance of not waiting for a direct threat before beginning an inquiry. Other alarming or troubling behavior can prompt a school threat assessment team to gather more information and make an assessment, even if the subject of concern does not threaten a target directly.

### **There is no accurate or useful profile of a “school shooter”.**

There is no useful set of traits that describes all—or even most—of the attackers. Instead, the demographic, personality, school history, and social characteristics of the attackers varied substantially. Knowing that a particular subject shares characteristics, behaviors, features or traits with prior school shooters does not help in determining whether that subject is thinking about or planning for a violent act. The use of profiles in this way is not an effective approach to identifying subjects who may pose a risk for targeted school violence at school or for assessing the risk that a particular subject may pose for a school-based attack, once a particular subject has been identified.

Reliance on profiles to predict future school attacks carries two substantial risks: (1) the great majority of subjects who fit any given profile of a "school shooter" will not actually pose a risk of targeted violence; and (2) using profiles will fail to identify some subjects who in fact pose a risk of violence but share few, if any, characteristics with prior attackers.

Rather than trying to determine the "type" of subject who may engage in targeted violence, an inquiry should focus instead on a subject’s behaviors and communications

to determine if that subject appears to be planning or preparing for an attack and, if so, how fast the subject is moving toward attack, and where intervention may be possible.

### **Most subjects had seriously concerned others prior to their act of violence.**

Nearly all of the subjects engaged in behaviors--prior to their attacks—that caused concern or alarm to at least one person, usually an adult, and most concerned or alarmed at least three people. In most of the cases, at least one adult was concerned by the attacker’s behavior (88 percent, n=36). In three-quarters of the cases, at least three people—adults and other children—were concerned by the attacker’s behavior (76 percent, n=31).

Almost all of the attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the attack that caused others—school officials, parents, teachers, police, fellow students—to be concerned (93 percent, n=38). The behaviors that led other individuals to be concerned about the attacker included both behaviors specifically related to the attack, such as efforts to get a gun, as well as other disturbing behaviors not related to the subsequent attack. The 2019 study confirmed similar findings in that all the perpetrators studied exhibited concerning behaviors observable to others with most having communicated intent.

### **Most subjects had significant difficulties with losses or failures. Most were suicidal.**

Most attackers appeared to have difficulty coping with losses, personal failures or other difficult circumstances. Almost all the attackers had experienced or perceived some major loss prior to the attack. These losses included a perceived failure or loss of status; loss of a loved one or of a significant relationship, including a romantic relationship; and a major illness experienced by the attacker or someone significant to him. Although most attackers had not received a formal mental health evaluation or diagnosis, most attackers exhibited a history of suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts at some point prior to their attack (78%). When we talk about case management, there are a lot of things we can do to help someone who is having difficulty coping with losses or failures – or who is desperate or even suicidal. The 2019 study also found that most of the perpetrators experienced psychological, behavioral, or developmental symptoms that contributed to accumulative stressors, and nearly all were experiencing negative home life factors. Thus, it is important to look at all three areas when assessing for risk.

### **Many subjects felt bullied, persecuted or injured by others prior to their act of violence.**

In the 2002 study, almost three-quarters of the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked or injured by others prior to the incident, and in the 2019 study, most of the perpetrators were victims of bullying often observed by others. In a number of the cases studied, attackers described being bullied in terms that suggested that these experiences approached torment. These attackers told of behaviors that, if they occurred in the workplace, likely would meet legal definitions of harassment and/or assault.

While bullying was not a factor in every case, and clearly not every child who is bullied in school will pose a risk for targeted violence in school, bullying dynamics are a strong contributing factor to interpersonal and targeted violence. Educators can play an important role in ensuring that students (and others) are not bullied in schools and empower other students to let adults in the school know if students are being bullied.

**Most subjects had access to weapons, and had used weapons, prior to the attack.**

Experience using weapons and access to them was common for many attackers. Nearly two-thirds of the attackers had a known history of weapons use, including knives, guns and bombs (63 percent, n=26). Over half of the attackers had some experience specifically with a gun prior to the incident (59 percent, n=24), while others had experience with bombs or explosives (15 percent, n=6).

Access to weapons among some subjects is common and the 2019 study found guns to be the most used weapon of choice with most weapons being acquired in the home. When the idea of an attack exists, any effort to acquire, prepare or use a weapon or ammunition may be a significant move in the attacker's progression from idea to action. Any inquiry should include investigation of and attention to weapon access and use and communications about weapons. Attention should also be given to any efforts by a subject to build a bomb or acquire bomb-making components. The large proportion of attackers who acquired their guns from home points to the need for schools and law enforcement officials to collaborate on policies and procedures for responding when a student is thought to have a firearm in school.

Schools should be aware of the provisions of the Federal Gun-Free Schools Act, which requires that all schools expel students who bring a gun to school and should report all violations to local law enforcement officials.

**In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.**

Although most attackers carried out their attacks on their own, many attackers were influenced or encouraged by others to engage in the attacks. In the 2002 study, nearly half of the attackers were influenced by other individuals in deciding to mount an attack, dared or encouraged by others to attack, or both (44 percent; n=18). Any investigation of potential targeted school violence should include attention to the role that a student's friends or peers may be playing in that student's thinking about and preparations for an attack. It is possible that feedback from friends or others may help to move a student from an unformed thought about attacking to developing and advancing a plan to carry out the attack.

**Despite prompt law enforcement response, most incidents were brief in duration, and were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.**

Even though law enforcement responded very quickly to these shootings once notified, most school-based attacks were stopped through intervention by school administrators, educators and students-or by the attacker stopping on their own. This appears in large part to be a function of how brief most of these incidents were in duration. The short duration of most incidents of targeted school violence argues for the importance of developing preventive measures in addition to any emergency planning for a school or school district. The preventive measures should include protocols and procedures for responding to and managing threats and other behaviors of concern.

## APPENDIX B: PRINCIPLES OF THREAT ASSESSMENT

The following principles guide threat assessment and management in K-12 schools and districts.<sup>11</sup>

### **Principle 1: Does the Subject Pose a Threat?**

The central question of a threat assessment is whether the subject poses a threat, NOT whether they made a threat. A threat assessment team should take all potential threatening behaviors seriously, not just those that have been verbalized or expressed in some other way. Similarly, just because a person has expressed intent to do harm does not necessarily mean that they pose a legitimate threat.

### **Principle 2: Targeted Violence Can Often Be Prevented**

Targeted violence in schools is typically the end result of a logical and potentially detectable progression of behavior. Attackers typically come up with an idea to do harm, develop a plan, acquire the means to do harm (e.g., get access to weapons), and then carry out the attack. A threat assessment team can look for information that may indicate that a person is on such a trajectory toward violence, and if so, the team then determines where it might be able to intervene to prevent harm.

### **Principle 3: Targeted Violence is a Function of Several Factors**

Threat assessment should examine facts about the individual, the context of behavior, the environment in which the individual lives, the individual's current situation, factors that may precipitate violence or other negative behavior, and ways to make a target less accessible or vulnerable.

### **Principle 4: Corroboration is Critical**

Being skeptical about information received and corroborating information through

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<sup>11</sup> Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, Modzeleski, W. & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education.

multiple sources are critical to successful threat assessment and management. This means that it is important to check facts where possible.

**Principle 5: Threat Assessment is about Behavior, not Profiles**

There is no single “type” of person who perpetrates targeted violence in schools. Instead, threat assessment is evidence-based, focusing on the specific behaviors a person has exhibited and determining whether the person poses a threat (or is at risk) based upon those behaviors.

**Principle 6: Cooperating Systems are Critical Resources**

Communication, collaboration, and coordination among various departments and agencies are critical throughout the process of threat assessment and management. Using different systems throughout campus as well as outside resources provides more eyes and ears on the process of both assessing and managing a potentially violent situation.

## APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR BTAM TEAMS

### Essential Elements of an Effective BTAM Process

Research and practice have shown that, to establish and sustain an effective behavioral threat assessment and management process, organizations must have a systematic process that:

- Utilizes an effective & relevant multi-disciplinary approach that enhances the team's ability to:
  - Understand the nature and process of targeted violence (see Appendix A)
  - Increase awareness of developing concerns/threats
  - Maximize skills and resources to address concerns
  - Enhance:
    - Communication (to, from & within the team)
    - Collaboration (working together for the best awareness and outcomes)
    - Coordination (engaging in planful and coordinate actions and interventions, within team and with outside partners)
    - Monitoring of progress and outcomes
  
- Is capable of addressing all identified threats, including those posed by
  - Students: Current, former & prospective
  - Employees: Current, former & prospective
  - Indirectly Affiliated: Relational partners, family members, parents, contractors/vendors
  - No known Affiliation: Other community members
  
- Enables centralized awareness of developing concerns through active outreach programs & consultations. Facilitates a thorough & contextual assessment utilizing proactive & integrated case management (e.g., STEP model)



- Monitors & re-assesses cases on a longitudinal basis
- Conducts all practices in accordance with relevant laws, policies, and standards of practice
- Adapts to challenges & changing needs.

### Key Considerations in the Inquiry & Assessment Process

As a BTAM team runs a threat assessment inquiry, it should keep a few points in mind. First, it is important to remember that violence is a dynamic process – meaning that as different factors change, so too may the threat that a subject poses – or does not pose. The team is not trying to predict/determine whether this subject is a “violent person.” Instead, the team is trying to determine under:

- what circumstances this subject might become violent or might resort to violence
- the impact of the situation upon others (even when a subject poses no identifiable threat)
- what environmental/system factors may be contributing to the situation
- whether there are any precipitating events on the foreseeable horizon and/or if there are any stressors contributing to risk
- are there any resiliency and support that can help to mitigate risk?

The team should also seek out, and factor in, information from multiple sources in its assessment, rather than relying on just one piece of information or perspective. The team should consider whether a source has direct and first-hand knowledge, their credibility, and the consistency of that source information with that of other sources.

Effective teams regularly monitor for, assess and work to minimize the negative impact of bias in decision-making.

And finally, the team should consider:

- when/whether to talk with the subject of concern as part of the inquiry
- who is best to have that conversation?
- when the subject of concern is from within the school (e.g., staff or student) it is recommended that someone from the BTAM team attempt to engage with and talk with the subject of concern. The team should think carefully about the best people

to talk with the subject, as asking for the subject’s side of the story can help diffuse hostility and start to build a rapport that will help make intervention possible.

Generally, it is best to have the subject learn from the team that people are concerned about their behavior. This allows them to have a chance to explain their behavior or contributing circumstances, rather than having that subject hear through the grapevine that they are being “investigated” by the threat assessment team.

## Conducting Interviews / Conversations

When running a threat assessment in a K-12 setting, or otherwise involving a student, we recommend talking about gathering information through “conversations” rather than “interviews.” These conversations are typically not done in custodial situations (such as you would find in a criminal investigation) and rather are intended to be a way to initiate a working relationship with the subject or student being assessed. This is true for others – like teachers, coaches, and school staff, that a threat assessment team may want to talk with regarding their relationship with and/or observations of the student whom the team is assessing. Prior to having these conversations, we recommend that the team discuss which team member is best suited or best positioned to be the one to have that conversation. With respect to whom a team may want to approach, we recommend that initial conversations involve the following:

- Person(s) reporting threat or concern
  - Person(s) receiving the initial report of threat or concern
  - Target / Recipient(s) of any threatening or unusual communications
  - Witness(es)
  - Subject who made the threat
- 
- Other potential sources:
    - Peers: Friends / Classmates / Co-workers (approach peers with discretion)
    - Employer, teachers, coaches
    - Parents
    - Local law enforcement /Community services

In addition to the value of the information that may be gained about a situation, the team should also consider the risks associated with each potential conversation. Peers of

subjects may warn the subject that the Team is looking into their behavior. Co-workers or relational partners may have biases for or against the subject (or target) that skews their response. The subject may be alerted that the school is aware of concerns and may escalate their behavior before they are stopped. The very act of asking questions about a subject, may cause concern/fear that they are dangerous, even if that turns out not to be the case. Rarely will team members know all of those potential dynamics before conversations are initiated, but they should be aware of the potential impact and reactions and monitor & plan for relevant contingencies.

### *Guidelines for Conversations*

Each conversation should be approached as a chance to gather information as well as a chance to establish or build a relationship with the person(s) in that conversation. In particular, in conversations with the subject of concern – the person that the team is assessing – we strongly recommend giving that person a chance to tell their side of the story and to feel “heard.” The same is true for victims or targets of a threat, as well as anyone who is expressing fear about someone else’s behavior. Below are guidelines and examples of questions that can be used in the threat assessment process.

#### *Nonverbal Behaviors*

Be aware of your own body posture. To convey interest and understanding, make good eye contact (be aware of cultural norms as eye contact between a student and someone of authority is not seen as culturally acceptable for some cultures), orient your body towards them, and maintain a physical posture of interest. Keep focused on the story/narrative of what the other person is disclosing. And be sure to minimize distractions by turning off sound notifications on your cell phone and try to avoid checking your phone or computer while the other person is speaking.

#### *Ask Skillful Questions*

How questions are phrased can be critical to the amount of detail you receive. Questions show you are interested in their perspective. There should be a balance between open and closed ended questions and avoid rapid firing of questions as you don’t want the person to feel they are being interrogated. Questions should be interspersed with reflective statements, affirmations, and other ways that show the person you are listening. The text box below offers some sample questions for conversations in threat assessment cases.

### *Allow the Person to Answer Fully*

No matter what question we ask, it is important that we let the person answer fully. Doing so helps them to feel heard – and also may help ensure that we don't miss any details in their answer. It can even be helpful to pause for just a few seconds before moving on to your next question so you do not make the person feel rushed and do not inadvertently cut off a longer response.

### Sample Questions for Use in BTAM Cases

#### **Open-Ended Questions**

The goal of open-ended questions is to get the person talking and to provide more detail. It can be helpful to start with open-ended questions that make it easy for the person to respond. An easy acronym to facilitate a good skill set with open-ended questions is OARS—open-ended questions, affirmations, reflective statements, and summarizing. Examples of open-ended questions:

#### *Conversation with Subject of Concern:*

- Tell me what happened as your perspective is important.
- How are you feeling right now?
- What happened when you were [place of incident]?
- What exactly did you say and do?(write down exact words)
- What was meant when you said (or did) that?
- How did you think he/she feels about what you said (or did)?
- What was the reason you said (or did) that? (note prior history of conflict)
- What are you going to do now that you have made this threat?
- How did the fight between you two begin?
- How could this situation get in the way of what you want to accomplish?
- How do you think this situation will help you accomplish what you want?
- What do you perceive as the consequences of carrying out this act of violence?
- How do you think your actions might affect your family? Your future?
- Who are the people you turn to for support?

#### *Conversation with Witness/Victim*

- What exactly happened when you were [place of incident]?
- What exactly did [student] say or do? (write down exact words)
- What do you think he/she meant when saying that?
- How do you feel about what he/she said (or did)? (note level of fear and if perceive as a true threat)
- Why did he/she say or do that? (note prior history of conflict)

### **Close-Ended Questions**

Close-ended questions can help provide clarification and help an uncomfortable youth to still engage in a conversation. Oftentimes, close ended questions are followed by open-ended questions to obtain additional information. Be careful not to ask too many closed-ended questions as the dynamics can then feel like an interrogation. Examples of close-ended questions:

#### *Conversation with Subject of Concern:*

- “Do you know why I wanted to talk with you?”
- “Are you feeling upset right now?”
- “Did the fight start because [name of person(s)] upset you?”
- “Do you think carrying out your plan will solve all your problems?”
- “Do you think it’ll be difficult for your family to deal with what you did or what could happen if you implemented (carried out) your plan?”

#### *Witness/Victim Conversation:*

- Are you concerned (scared, fearful, worried....)?
- Are others concerned?
- Are you scared to come to school?
- Do you think this can be resolved peacefully? If so, how?

## **Fostering Effective Case Discussions**

When a BTAM team discusses the case to make its assessment, it can be helpful to keep in mind the following tips:

- Keep the discussion focused on the facts of the case as well as considering the importance of the unknowns.
- Avoid the tendency to profile based on generalizations, focus on behavior.
- Make sure to factor in any context that helps understand the threatening behaviors.
- Look at whether behavior is improving, deteriorating, or escalating over time.
- Try to corroborate critical information – check the facts among multiple sources, work to resolve discrepancies
- Everyone should voice their concerns and opinion to the whole team, even if doing so leads to lengthier discussion or disagreement. Be aware of personal biases that may impact perception of concern and interpretation of data.
- The Team should focus on what is still positive for the subject in question – what is still working for them – and find a way to maximize that positive aspect. Build upon supports and resiliency.
- The team can also focus on what is changeable – thinking back to the fact that several factors typically contribute to violence (i.e. the subject, target, environment & precipitating events, that might be encouraging violence or supporting it; the target, where the subject may feel that doing harm to that target could solve a problem). The team can think about what in this equation is changeable (e.g., decreasing stressors), what can be prevented (e.g., bullying), or what can help protect the subject from adverse circumstances (e.g., assign a mentor) – and then factor that into their case management plan.

Team members should be inquisitive and challenge assumptions that are often made in cases. Consider the basis for the information and/or the assumption, along with its credibility and relevance.

### Understanding Biases in Decision-Making

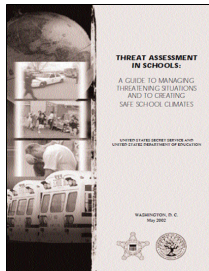
Seek to minimize bias in decision-making. When BTAM teams make assessment decisions, they should consider sources of bias/distortion in personal and team thought processes. These should be monitored and include (but are not limited to):

Implicit Bias	Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner; feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, age, appearance); associations (positive or negative) can develop at an early age; influenced by exposure to direct and indirect messages, including media and news
Explicit Bias	Attitudes and beliefs toward certain types of individual(s) or group on a conscious level; often a direct result of a perceived threat, thus more likely to draw group boundaries to distinguish themselves from others; racism and prejudices
Confirmation Bias	Tendency to look for evidence or interpret information in a way that confirms a preconceived opinion; notice facts that already support own beliefs and ignore those that do not
Availability Bias	Assign importance to behaviors that immediately come to mind; miss or overlook importance of older information; if current news story (e.g., recent school shooting) all referred threats are seen as serious – can lead to overuse and misuse of suspension and expulsion
Hindsight Bias	Occurs after an event; person(s) may see the event as more predictable than it really was; leads to blame or belief could have predicted or prevented violent acts
Groupthink Bias	More likely to align own opinions with the group majority; fear of dissenting
Anchoring	Base final judgment on information gained early on – first impressions may bias future perspectives
Overconfidence	Failure to spot limits of knowledge and therefore perceive less risk. Too much faith in ability
In-Group bias	Overestimate abilities, value and credibility of people we know (or are similar to) than people we don't know or who are different
Probability neglect	Overestimate risks of harmless or low probability events, while underestimate risks of high probability events even when they are not harmless (1/84 chance of dying in vehicle accident vs 1/5,000+ of dying in plane crash).
Fundamental attribution error	Place blame for own bad outcomes on external events. When others have bad outcomes, make judgements about them – failure to account for person-situation interaction

Sources: Daniel Kahneman (2013) *Thinking Fast & Slow*; Melissa Reeves (2021) *Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management for K-12 Schools*

## APPENDIX D: FREE RESOURCES FOR K-12 BTAM EFFORTS

There are several resources that inform and guide the following approach to the behavioral threat assessment and management process. Following is a listing of key resources. All are open-source materials that are free.

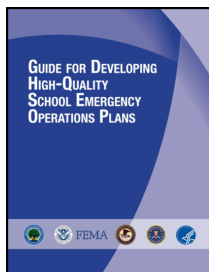


**The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States (2002)**  
Available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf>

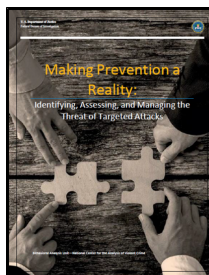


**Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates (2004)**  
Available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf>

Available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf>

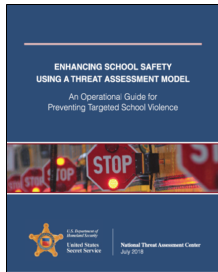


**Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Plans (2013)**  
Available at: [rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS\\_K-12\\_Guide\\_508.pdf](https://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf)



**Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing & Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks (2017)**  
Available at: [www.fbi.gov/file-repository/making-prevention-a-reality.pdf](https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/making-prevention-a-reality.pdf)

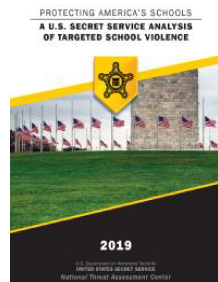




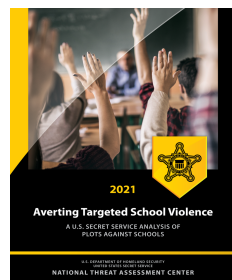
**Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model:  
An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence (2018)**  
Available at: <https://www.secretservice.gov/protection/ntac>



**School Resource Officers, School Law Enforcement Units, and Family Educational Rights  
and Privacy Act (FERPA). (2019)**  
Available at:  
[https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource\\_document/file/SRO\\_FAQs\\_2-5-19\\_0.pdf](https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/SRO_FAQs_2-5-19_0.pdf)



**Protecting America's Schools. A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School  
Violence (2019).**  
Available at: <https://www.secretservice.gov/protection/ntac/>



**Averting Targeted School Violence: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Plots  
Against Schools (2021).**  
Available at: <https://www.secretservice.gov/protection/ntac>

## APPENDIX E: INTERVENTION & MANAGEMENT PLANNING

### BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT: *Resource Mapping: Interventions & Monitoring*

This appendix can be used to help BTAM teams identify what intervention and/or monitoring supports are currently available to actively manage BTAM cases, and to also identify what supports are not currently being utilized but could be. This appendix can also be referenced when planning for individual case management.

**Directions:**

1. Place an **“X”** in the box on the left of the interventions and/or monitoring supports that are ***currently being used to actively manage BTAM cases***.
2. Place a **✓** in the box on the right of the intervention and/or monitoring supports that ***could be used to actively manage BTAM cases (but are not currently being used)***.

**DISCIPLINE**

<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Letter of Apology <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict Resolution <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Warning <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Restorative Practice <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Removing privileges <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Identify triggers and (self) initiated time-out <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Behavior Contract	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Parent Meeting <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Ticketed by law enforcement <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Charges filed by law enforcement <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Law Enforcement Diversion Program <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Court issues protective orders <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> No-contact order	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Detention <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Suspension <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative to Suspension <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Habitually Disruptive Plan <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative placement <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Expulsion <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> : _____ <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> : _____
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**MONITORING**

<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Check-in, checkout <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Searches <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Safety contract <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Adult/increased monitoring <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Late arrival/early dismissal <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Adult escorts from class-to-class, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Modify daily schedule (reduce free, unsupervised time; travel card) <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Restrictions	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> On-going progress monitoring <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Track attendance <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> No contact agreement <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Parent-school collaboration <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Parent/guardian will provide increased supervision <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor for precipitating events (i.e., anniversaries, losses, perceived injustice, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Change class schedule <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Reinforcement program	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Home visits (home-school connectedness, check for weapons, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Searches <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Ankle monitor <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing collaboration with agency supports, probation/juvenile diversion, mental health professionals <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Detained, incarcerated, or placed under intensive supervision <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____
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**RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**

<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Establish system for student to seek support proactively from an adult <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Peer mentor <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Adult mentor <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide feedback and mentoring <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Peer supports	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Increase engagement in school activities <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Increase engagement in community activities <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Engage in leadership activities <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> De-escalation training for staff <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Decrease isolation <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor reactions to grievances, precipitating events and provide supports <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Trauma-informed training for staff <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____
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**SKILL DEVELOPMENT/RESILIENCY BUILDING**

<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Academic supports <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict resolution <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Anger management <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Social skills group <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Social-emotional learning\ curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Participation in school activities/clubs	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Supports from behavior specialist/school psychologist <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling – in school <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling – outside of school <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Conduct functional behavioral assessment (FBA) <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Develop behavioral intervention plan (BIP) <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Family supports/resources	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____
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**ADDITIONAL INTERVENTIONS**

<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Revise IEP/504 Plan <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Intervention team referral <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Change in transportation <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluation – psychiatric/psychological <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Special education assessment <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Drug/alcohol intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Change in class schedule <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Change in school day schedule (e.g., delayed start, reduced day) <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Change of placement to access more intensive services <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> McKinney-Vento/foster care referral <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Social service referral	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____
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It is also important to address school climate and culture. Thus, the following also need to be considered:

**SCHOOL CLIMATE & CULTURE**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Address systemic, procedural, or policy problems that may serve as precipitating events</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Build a caring and supportive climate and culture</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Implement effective threat and suicide assessment procedures</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Universal screenings for academic and social-emotional learning barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Enhance social-emotional learning to include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Bullying prevention</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Violence prevention</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Suicide prevention</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional regulation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict management</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure positive dynamics among staff (serves as modeling for students)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Early intervention with emerging problems (MTSS supports)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Explicitly teach about confidential reporting procedures</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Give permission to “Break the Code of Silence” and get help for a peer who is struggling</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> </ul>
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\*Source: Reeves, M. (2021). *Behavioral threat assessment and management for K-12 schools*.

Other strategies that can be utilized in case management:

## APPENDIX F: SELECT BOOKS AND ARTICLES FOR FURTHER READING

- ASIS International & Society for Human Resources Management (2020). *Workplace violence and active assailant-prevention, intervention and response: American National Standard*. Alexandria, VA: ASIS International.

Available at: [www.asisonline.org/publications/sg-asis-shrm-workplace-violence-prevention-and-intervention-standard/](http://www.asisonline.org/publications/sg-asis-shrm-workplace-violence-prevention-and-intervention-standard/)

- Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (2006). *Risk assessment guideline elements for violence: Considerations for assessing the risk of future violent behavior*. Sacramento, CA: Author.

Available at: [cdn.ymaws.com/www.atapworldwide.org/resource/resmgr/imported/documents/RAGE-V.pdf](http://cdn.ymaws.com/www.atapworldwide.org/resource/resmgr/imported/documents/RAGE-V.pdf)

- DeBecker, G. (1997). *The gift of fear: And other survival signals that protect us from violence*. New York, NY: Dell.

- Deisinger, G., Randazzo, M., O'Neill, D. & Savage, J. (2008). *The handbook for campus threat assessment & management teams*. Boston, MA: Applied Risk Management, LLC.

Available at:

<https://www.amazon.com/Handbook-Campus-Threat-Assessment-Management/dp/0615234933>

- Drysdale, D.A., Modzeleski, W., & Simons, A.B. (April 2010). *Campus attacks: Targeted violence affecting institutions of higher education*. Washington, DC: United States Secret Service, United States Department of Education, and Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Available at: [www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/campus-attacks.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/campus-attacks.pdf)

- Meloy J.R. & Hoffman, J. (2021). *International Handbook of Threat Assessment* (2nd Ed). Oxford University Press: New York.

Available (for purchase) at:

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/international-handbook-of-threat-assessment-9780190940164?cc=us&lang=en&>

- Meloy, J.R. & Hoffmann, J. (2014). *International Handbook of Threat Assessment*. New York, NY: Oxford Press.

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- Mohandie, K. (2000). *School violence threat management: A practical guide for educators, law enforcement, and mental health professionals*. San Diego, CA: Specialized Training Services.  
Available at:  
[www.amazon.com/School-Violence-Threat-Management-Mohandie/dp/097031891X](http://www.amazon.com/School-Violence-Threat-Management-Mohandie/dp/097031891X)
- Nolan, J., Randazzo, M.R. & Deisinger, G. (2011). *Campus Threat Assessment and Management Teams: What Risk Managers Need to Know Now*. URMIA Journal, 2011  
Available at: [www.sigmatma.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NolanRandazzoDeisinger\\_CampusThreatAssessmentTeams\\_FINAL\\_20110802.pdf](http://www.sigmatma.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NolanRandazzoDeisinger_CampusThreatAssessmentTeams_FINAL_20110802.pdf)
- O’Toole, M. E. (2000). The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective. Quantico, VA: National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, Federal Bureau of Investigation.  
Available at:  
[www.fbi.gov/file-repository/stats-services-publications-school-shooter-school-shooter](http://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/stats-services-publications-school-shooter-school-shooter)
- Pollack, W., Modzeleski, W., Rooney, G. (2008) *Prior knowledge of potential school-based violence: Information students learn may prevent a targeted attack*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education.  
Available at: [https://rems.ed.gov/Docs/ED\\_BystanderStudy.pdf](https://rems.ed.gov/Docs/ED_BystanderStudy.pdf)
- Reddy, M., Borum, R., Berglund, J., Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2001). Evaluating risk for targeted violence in schools: Comparing risk assessment, threat assessment, and other approaches. *Psychology in the Schools*, 38, 157-172.
- Reeves, M.A. & Brock, S.B. (2017). School Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management. *Journal Contemporary School Psychology*, 1-15. Doi: 10.1007/s40688-017-0158-6.  
Available at: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40688-017-0158-6>
- Reeves, M. (2021). Behavioral threat assessment and management for K-12 schools. Chattanooga, TN: National Center for Youth Issues.  
Available at: <https://ncyi.org/shop/landingpages/15-minute-focus-series/>
- Silver, J., Simons, A., & Craun, S. (2018). *A Study of the Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States Between 2000 – 2013*. Federal Bureau of Investigation,

U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C. 20535.

Available at: [www.fbi.gov/file-repository/pre-attack-behaviors-of-active-shooters-in-us-2000-2013.pdf](http://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/pre-attack-behaviors-of-active-shooters-in-us-2000-2013.pdf)

- Society for Human Resource Management & ASIS International (2011). *Workplace Violence Prevention and Intervention: An American National Standard*.

Available at: <https://webstore.ansi.org/standards/asis/asisshrmwvp2011>

- United States Department of Education (October 2007). *Balancing student privacy rights and school safety: A guide to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act for colleges and universities*. Washington, DC: Author.

Available at:

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/resources/balancing-student-privacy-and-school-safety-guide-family-educational-rights-and-privacy>

- Van Dreal, J. (Ed.) (2011). *Assessing student threats: A handbook for implementing the Salem-Keizer System*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Available at: [www.studentthreatassessment.org/](http://www.studentthreatassessment.org/)

- Virginia Center for School & Campus Safety (2016). *Threat Assessment in Virginia Schools: Model Policies Procedures and Guidelines*. Author: Richmond VA.

Available at:

[www.dcjs.virginia.gov/sites/dcjs.virginia.gov/files/publications/law-enforcement/threat-assessment-model-policies-procedures-and-guidelinespdf.pdf](http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/sites/dcjs.virginia.gov/files/publications/law-enforcement/threat-assessment-model-policies-procedures-and-guidelinespdf.pdf)

## APPENDIX G: PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND ONLINE RESOURCES

### **Association of Threat Assessment Professionals**

[www.atapworldwide.org](http://www.atapworldwide.org)

The Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) is a non-profit organization of law enforcement, prosecutors, mental health professionals, corporate security experts, probation and parole personnel, and others involved in threat & management, and violence risk assessment. The purpose of ATAP is to afford its members a professional and educational environment to exchange ideas and strategies to address such issues as stalking, threats, and homeland security. The Association's website includes a Resource Library, Conference presentation materials, and information about membership and events.

### **Averted School Violence Project**

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

The Averted School Violence Near Miss reporting system, developed with support from the COPS Office, allows law enforcement officers, school personnel, and mental health professionals to share "close calls" in order to improve school safety and prevent tragedies.

Our mission is to encourage individuals to share their stories and lessons learned from averted school violence incidents in order to prevent future injuries and fatalities in educational institutions. The lessons learned can be used to inform future school policy and safety procedures. Sharing your story is an anonymous, secure, non-punitive, and confidential process.

### **Colorado School Safety Resource Center**

<https://cssrc.colorado.gov/>

The CSSRC provides free consultation, resources, training, and technical assistance to foster safe and secure learning environments, positive school climates, and early intervention to prevent crisis situations. CSSRC supports schools and local agencies in their efforts to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from all types of emergencies and crisis situations. Information and resources from the CSSRC are available to all schools, school officials, and community partners throughout the State of Colorado.

### **Family Policy Compliance Office, US Department of Education**

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oepd/sppo/index.html>

The mission of the Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO) is to meet the needs of the Department's primary customers--learners of all ages--by effectively implementing two laws



that seek to ensure student and parental rights in education: the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA).

### **National Alliance on Mental Illness**

[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. The website has many resources about mental health concerns

### **National Association of School Psychologists**

[www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is a professional association that represents more than 25,000 school psychologists, graduate students, and related professionals throughout the United States and 25 other countries. The world's largest organization of school psychologists, NASP works to advance effective practices to improve students' learning, behavior, and mental health. Our vision is that all children and youth thrive in school, at home, and throughout life.

### **National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE)**

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

The Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to: provide training and support to state administrators, institutions of higher education; teachers; support staff at schools; communities and families; and students and seek to improve schools' conditions for learning through measurement and program implementation, so that all students have the opportunity to realize academic success in safe and supportive environments. The Center's website includes information about the Center's training and technical assistance, products and tools, and latest research findings.

### **National Resource Center on Domestic Violence**

[www.nrcdv.org](http://www.nrcdv.org)

The Center is an independent, non-profit organization that serves as a comprehensive source of information for those wanting to educate themselves and help others on the many issues related to domestic violence.

## **National Resource Center on Workplace Responses**

[www.workplacesrespond.org](http://www.workplacesrespond.org)

Funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, the Center offers resources for those interested in providing effective workplace responses to victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, dating violence, and stalking. The site contains a workplace policy creation tool offering choices of model language.

## **Safe and Sound Schools**

<https://safeandsoundschools.org/>

Safe and Sounds Schools was founded by parents who lost their child in the Sandy Hook tragedy. Safe and Sound Schools is focused on collaborative, multi-disciplinary approaches to help protect schools. Many free resources are available to download including guidance for safety planning for students with disabilities, safety tool kits, how to begin a student school safety committee, parent and educator resources, and many more. They also have a speaker's bureau composed of school safety experts and educators with extensive experience in school safety, prevention through recovery.

## **Stalking Resource Center, National Center for Victims of Crime**

<https://victimsofcrime.org/stalking-resource-center/>

The Center works to enhance the ability of professionals, organizations, and systems to respond effectively to stalking by providing training, technical assistance, and resource materials for professionals working with and responding to stalking.

## **Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety / Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services**

[www.dcjs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/k-12](http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/k-12)

The Virginia Center for School & Campus Safety is dedicated to supporting our constituents in the K-12 environment through training, with resources and technical assistance, and by guiding best practices. One of the many important components for K-12 schools is Safety & Security - on this portion of the website visitors will find information on School Security Officers, the annual School Safety Audit, and other school safety topics.

A variety of resources (including this guidance document) can also be obtained through the VCSCS site, under the K-12 resources located at:

[www.dcjs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/k-12/resources](http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/k-12/resources)

## **Youth Violence Project of the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia**

[curry.virginia.edu/research/labs/youth-violence-project](https://curry.virginia.edu/research/labs/youth-violence-project)

The Youth Violence Project conducts research on effective methods and policies for youth violence prevention and school safety. The project's website contains extensive information about the Virginia model of threat assessment, an approach to violence prevention that emphasizes early attention to problems such as bullying, teasing, and other forms of student conflict before they escalate into violent behavior. School staff members are encouraged to adopt a flexible, problem-solving approach, as distinguished from a more punitive, zero tolerance approach to student misbehavior.

## APPENDIX H: SAMPLE POLICIES

We include herein two sample policies that schools and districts can consider adopting when starting (or updating) school behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) program. The sample policies meet the elements of effective school threat assessment policies identified in current standards of practice.<sup>12</sup> Schools and districts can also combine aspects of the model policies to build a more detailed policy or use elements of the sample policies provided to create a new policy.

In addition to adopting a board policy for school threat assessment, we encourage schools and districts to develop operating guidelines or procedures that their BTAM team(s) should follow to use the BTAM process. Separating procedures out from a policy statement allows for easier revision to procedures and operating guidelines, as well as permits procedural flexibility in situations that may require flexibility to reduce a risk posed.

### Sample Policy – Option 1

#### School Board Policy on School Threat Assessment<sup>13</sup>

- **Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Team(s)**: The Superintendent shall establish school-based behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) team(s) to assess and intervene with individuals whose behavior may pose a threat to the safety of students, school staff, and/or visitors.
  - The Superintendent may establish one or more threat assessment teams as needed to ensure every school in the district has access to a BTAM team.
- **District Team**: The Superintendent may also establish a District-wide support and advisory team that can support the needs of the district’s behavioral threat assessment and management process.
- **Team Authority**: Each BTAM team is authorized to engage in school behavioral threat assessment and management procedures, including:

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<sup>12</sup> National Threat Assessment Center (2018). Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service. See also Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>13</sup> For a similar model school board policy for Virginia schools, see Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (2016). Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines (2d Edition). Richmond, VA: Author.

- o identify persons (or situations) whose behavior raises concerns about school safety;
  - o gather information from multiple sources to get a fuller perspective on the person's behavior, intent, and situation;
  - o assess the available information to determine if the person poses a threat of violence (whether the threat posed is to others, to self, or to both others and self); and,
  - o develop, implement, and monitor a plan to reduce the threat posed and enhance the school's safety.
- Team Jurisdiction: Each BTAM team shall have authority to engage in behavioral threat assessment and management procedures in situations where:
    - o There is a communication (verbal, written, gestured, via social media, or by other means) threatening violence to others or to self and others; or,
    - o There is other behavior that raises concern about potential violence to others or to self and others.
    - o Cases or situations where the only threat or concern is about potential suicide or self-harm shall be referred the school's psychologist or counselor to follow the school's existing procedures for a safety assessment or suicide assessment.
- Team Membership: Each BTAM team shall include members with expertise in the following areas:
    - o School administration
    - o Education
    - o Mental Health
    - o Law enforcement
    - o Ad hoc members for particular cases (e.g. Special Education personnel)
- Team Responsibilities:
    - o Each BTAM team shall engage in behavioral threat assessment and management procedures listed herein, in situations that meet the BTAM team's jurisdiction;
    - o Each BTAM team shall confer with the Superintendent to comply with district policy and state law as to when threat assessment matters should be referred to law enforcement;
    - o Each BTAM team shall follow district suicide assessment policy in matters where a threat assessment team determines that a student poses a threat of harm to self, referring that student for further assessment and intervention to the applicable in-school or community-based mental health resource;

- o Each BTAM team shall also engage in periodic efforts to encourage students, employees, volunteers, parents, and visitors to report threatening communications or behavior;
  - o Each BTAM team shall provide guidance to students, employees, volunteers, parents, and visitors about what threatening behaviors to report and where to report those concerns.
- **Mandatory Reporting:**
    - o All employees, volunteers, and contractors are required to report any communicated or expressed threat, or other behavior that may represent a threat to the safety of the community, school, and/or self.

## Sample Policy – Option 2

### Violence-Free Schools Policy

**VIOLENCE IN PROCESS OR IMMEDIATE THREATS: DIAL 911:** Violence currently in progress or threats of imminent violence should be reported immediately to local law enforcement (dial 911) for emergency response coordination.

**POTENTIAL THREATS:** Potential threats of violence should be immediately reported to the assigned Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) Team.

#### Purpose

The \_\_\_\_\_ District is committed to provide a learning and working environment that is free from violence. A Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Program has been established for all district schools, to evaluate both immediate and potential threats of school violence and to intervene where possible to prevent harm. BTAM teams are authorized to engage in school behavioral threat assessment and management procedures on behalf of the district, with a goal of preventing harm and providing support.

#### Prohibition on Retaliation and False Reports

All employees, students, volunteers, parents, and visitors shall report all acts of violence and threats of violence to the appropriate BTAM Team.

This policy prohibits retaliation against anyone who, in good faith, reports a threat or other troubling behavior. All reports of violence will be handled in a confidential manner, with information released on a need-to-know basis.

Deliberately false reports of threats or deliberately false reports of other troubling behavior shall be considered instances of unacceptable personal conduct and may be subject to disciplinary action.

### **Prohibited Behaviors**

It is a violation of this policy to:

- Engage in violence, or threaten to engage in violence, at any school and/or against any student or employee;
- Possess, use, or threaten to use an unauthorized weapon;
- Engage in off-campus violent conduct or threat that has a potential adverse impact on employees, students, facilities, volunteers, visitors, or vendors

A violation of this policy may be grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. An act of off-campus violent conduct may be covered by this policy and may also be grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

### **Restraining Orders**

If a member of the \_\_\_\_\_ District community has a protective order or restraining order that may cover them while at any \_\_\_\_\_ District facility in any capacity, they should notify the Superintendent and/or the Coordinator of Emergency Management and Safe Schools.

### **Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management**

\_\_\_\_\_ District has developed behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) teams that will assess and respond to immediate and potential acts of school violence. The teams involve representatives of school administration, law enforcement, mental health / counseling, and will involve other representatives as needed (e.g. a representative from Special Education). The teams will be responsible for following best-practice procedures in school behavioral threat assessment and management, for any situation referred to the team where there is a concern about potential violence to others or to self and others. Behavioral threat assessment and management procedures include receiving reports about threats and other troubling behavior, gathering additional information, conducting objective assessments, determining appropriate risk-reduction responses where necessary, and conducting related activities to encourage employees, students, vendors, volunteers, and visitors to report threats and other troubling behavior that raises concern about potential violence.

## APPENDIX I: ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Below are bios of the subject matter experts in school behavioral threat assessment and management who co-authored or otherwise contributed to this guide. These contributors originally came from SIGMA Threat Management Associates, which is now part of Ontic, a provider of protective intelligence software and behavioral threat assessment training and services. All those listed below are nationally- recognized subject matter experts within the field of behavioral threat assessment, school safety, and school violence prevention.

### Marisa Reddy Randazzo, Ph.D.

Dr. Randazzo is an international expert on threat assessment, targeted violence, and violence prevention. She is Executive Director of Threat Management at Ontic and is the co-founder and previously CEO of SIGMA Threat Management, which is now an Ontic company. In addition to her work at Ontic, she currently serves as Director of Threat Assessment for Georgetown University. Previously, Dr. Randazzo served for ten years with the U.S. Secret Service, most recently as the agency's Chief Research Psychologist. Among her various responsibilities, she co-directed the *Safe School Initiative*, the landmark federal study of school shootings that was conducted jointly by the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education.

Dr. Randazzo is an accomplished presenter and instructor on threat assessment investigations, having trained over 15,000 professionals in law enforcement, management, administration, mental health, and the intelligence community throughout the United States, Canada, and the European Union. Her research is used in the federal, state, and local law enforcement communities and has been credited in the media with preventing planned attacks. She is co-author of two leading books on threat assessment: *The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment and Management Teams* (2008) and *Implementing Behavioral Threat Assessment on Campus: A Virginia Tech Demonstration Project* (2009); both books are referenced as best-practice resources in several federal guides on emergency planning and in an American National Standard.

Dr. Randazzo has testified before Congress and is frequently interviewed by major television, radio, and print news outlets for analysis regarding violent incidents and prevention strategies. She serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Threat Assessment & Management*. She has served as a subject matter expert in testimony before Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy's Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, as a reviewer for the White House's federal Guides to High Quality Emergency Plans (for schools, for higher education institutions, and for houses of worship), and as a member of the American Psychological Association's Expert Panel on Preventing Gun Violence.



Dr. Randazzo received her Ph.D. and Master's degree from Princeton University in Social Psychology, and a B.A. in Psychology and Religion from Williams College. Dr. Randazzo was awarded the Williams College Bicentennial Medal for her work in preventing violence. Most recently, Dr. Randazzo was named one of the Top 100 Women in Security by the Security Industry Association and was also named a top security influencer IFSAC.

#### Dr. Melissa Reeves, Ph.D., NCSP, LCMHC

Dr. Reeves is Past-President of the National Association of School Psychologists, a nationally certified school psychologist, licensed clinical mental health counselor, and licensed special education teacher. Most recently she was an Associate Professor at Winthrop University and has over 20-years' experience working in public schools, a private school, and day and residential treatment programs. She is a senior consultant with Sigma Threat Management Associates, an Ontic company, and lead author of the *South Carolina Department of Education School-Based Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Best Practice Guidelines*. Dr. Reeves is co-author of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) PREPaRE School Crisis Prevention and Intervention curriculum and former Chair (and current member) of the NASP School Safety and Crisis Response Committee. She was a founding member of the Colorado Society of School Psychologists State-Wide Crisis Response Team, which trained school districts across Colorado in crisis response and was also a crisis responder to support students after Columbine. In addition to responding to various crises over the years, she travels both nationally and internationally training professionals in the areas of school crisis prevention through recovery, threat and suicide assessment, the impact of trauma on academic achievement, and works with schools on establishing a positive and safe school climate. She also served on her university's Critical Incident Management Team and the College of Arts and Science COVID-19 Recovery committee. Dr. Reeves is also a Senior Advisor for Safe and Sound Schools, an organization founded by two parents who lost their children in the Sandy Hook tragedy. She has conducted more than 300 workshops and presentations and has also provided consultation and staff development to professionals in the United States Department of Defense Educational Activity Schools located on various military installations.

Dr. Reeves has authored six books: *School Crisis Prevention and Intervention: The PREPaRE Model* (original and 2nd Edition); *Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences*; *Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management for K-12 Schools*; *Identifying, Assessing, and Treating PTSD at School*; and *Comprehensive Planning for Safe Learning Environments: A School Professional's Guide to Integrating Physical and Psychological Safety: Prevention through Recovery* and has co-authored numerous book chapters and journal articles.

Dr. Reeves has received the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Presidential Award three times (2006, 2012, 2018) and the NASP Crisis Interest Group Award for Excellence twice (2007, 2011). She was a 2007 national finalist for the Joseph E. Zins "Purpose" Award for Early Career Practitioners in Social Learning; in 2006 awarded Golden Heart Award, presented by Cherry Creek School District Parent Special Education Advisory Council; and received the University of Denver, College of Education Leadership in Learning Alumni Award (2006).

#### Dorian Van Horn, M.S.

Dorian Van Horn, is the Director, Investigative Operations, SIGMA Threat Management, an Ontic company. In this role, she provides training, strategic reviews and assists companies, educational institutions and foundations manage concerning behaviors. She holds a Master of Science degree from Catholic University of America in Emergency Services Administration (MS ESA). She was appointed as a Government Advisor, by the Secretary of Defense, to the Defense Science Board (DSB) Task Force on Predicting Violent Behavior after the Ft. Hood attack. Ms. Van Horn was appointed as an advisor to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Office of Intelligence and Analysis, National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) Program. Additionally, she serves as an Appointed Advisor, Violence/Threat Assessment Advisory Work Group, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. She was a member of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) Certification and Development team for the Certified Threat Manager (CTM) Examination. Before joining the private sector, Ms. Van Horn served over 25 years as a Special Agent with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS). She was the Division Chief/Program Manager for the Threat Management Unit/Insider Threat (TMU/InT ) as well as the Family & Sexual Violence (F&SV) unit. She served as the Supervisory Special Agent for Violent Crime, Death, Cold Case Homicide, and Special Interest Investigations. She is the National First Vice President for the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP), and former president of the ATAP DC Chapter. She was awarded the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) Meritorious Service Award. Ms. Van Horn has a certificate of completion, Forensic Linguistics, Hofstra University. She has been invited to participate in the Washington Institute CVE Roundtable Series, through the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Program at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Her publications include: *The International Handbook of Threat Assessment; the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Municipal Police Officers' Education & Training Commission-Threat Assessment and Management; Final Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Predicting Violent Behavior; and School of Threats, Security Management Magazine.*

#### William Modzeleski, M.A.

William Modzeleski is a nationally recognized leader in the area of school safety and emergency management. Mr. Modzeleski is a former Associate Assistant Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools. During his tenure at the Department of Education Mr. Modzeleski was instrumental in the development and implementation of several programs related to emergency management and violence prevention. These programs included: Safe Schools/Healthy Students Program (a multi-agency effort designed to approach violence prevention from a comprehensive perspective); School Emergency Response to Violence (a program designed to bring assistance to schools immediately after a crisis that has affected teaching and learning); and the REMS program (a program designed to assist schools improve their emergency management plans). Mr. Modzeleski also played a leadership role in numerous studies related to school shootings, radicalization and violent extremism. Mr. Modzeleski served as co-author with staff from U.S. Secret Service on the Safe School Initiative, and co-author with staff from Secret Service and FBI on study on Targeted Attacks at Institutions of Higher Education. Mr. Modzeleski assisted the Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute in the design of studies related to terrorist incidents involving education targets, emergency management planning in international schools, recruitment and radicalization by international terrorist groups, and a review of school-aged youth involved in terrorist activities. Mr. Modzeleski was also led ED's efforts to assist schools after events disrupted teaching. These events ranged from Columbine to Virginia Tech, and from Hurricanes Rita and Katrina to the tornado in Joplin MO. Mr. Modzeleski also led team that worked closely with staff from the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) on efforts to stem the spread of the H1N1 epidemic. Mr. Modzeleski is a Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute. Prior to his federal service he served in the U.S. Army, with service in the U.S. and Vietnam. He holds a BA from the University of Bridgeport (where he recently was named a distinguished alum), and a MA from C.W. Post College.

#### Jeffrey J. Nolan, J.D.

Jeff Nolan is an education and employment attorney with Holland & Knight who represents, advises, educates and helps clients nationwide manage conflicts, enhance the safety of individuals and environments, and successfully navigate the maze of legal obligations faced by educational institutions and employers. Mr. Nolan represents and advises educational institutions throughout the United States regarding situations that implicate Title IX, the Clery Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and other laws that apply in the higher education context. He also conducts compliance assessments and helps clients develop Title IX/Clery Act and other policies, practices and training programs to minimize risk and enhance compliance with those laws. He also advises

higher educational institutions on the governance, faculty relations and related challenges that they face in the current economic and regulatory environment. Mr. Nolan assists employers in dealing with the full range of employee relations issues, advises them on how to comply with applicable employment laws, and helps them to create effective employment policies and training programs. Mr. Nolan also advises clients on threat assessment practices, using a proven methodology to assess and manage potential risks of targeted violence in the higher education and workplace settings, and he helps clients create violence prevention policies. Mr. Nolan is a Certified FETI® Practitioner (CFP-B).

#### Tara Conway, M.A.

Tara Conway is the Director of Threat Assessment and Management Operations at Ontic. Ms. Conway previously worked for the U.S. Secret Service (USSS) for ten years in threat assessment and protective intelligence, where she served as a senior analyst in the Intelligence Division and National Threat Assessment Center. She was responsible for the case management of subjects considered dangerous to U.S. Secret Service protectees. Additionally, she was responsible for the research, development and preparation of threat assessments on numerous protectees, visiting Heads of State, and foreign dignitaries. Within the National Threat Assessment Center, she served as a senior researcher on the *Safe School Initiative* - the joint U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education study of school shooters – and provided extensive training on the findings of the *Safe School Initiative* and on school threat assessment.

Ms. Conway also managed a national program of psychiatrists contracted by the Secret Service to consult on cases involving subjects with complex mental histories who had threatened violent action against Secret Service protectees. In this role, she served as a critical liaison between the mental health community, law enforcement agencies, and protective intelligence subjects. She is an accomplished briefer, having presented to well over 15,000 members of local, state and federal law enforcement, private sector companies, and school personnel on matters of threat assessment and other intelligence topics. She developed and presented training in support of protective intelligence investigations and provided intelligence support in the coordinating centers of major events, to include the Democratic National Convention and the World Trade Organization.

She has a diverse background in threat assessment, having worked in the areas of protective intelligence, safety in schools, preventing targeted terrorist violence, and biometrics. She has extensive experience collaborating with national and international intelligence agencies, Department of Defense elements, as well as local, state and federal law enforcement agencies to analyze threats and coordinate efforts in the areas of response and prevention. Ms. Conway has also assisted various federal agencies with full- scale project management design and coordination.

Ms. Conway has a B.A. in Psychology and an M.A in Psychology. She is trained in threat assessment and protective intelligence.

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