

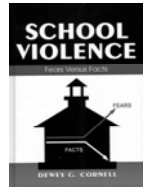
# The Virginia Model for Student Threat Assessment

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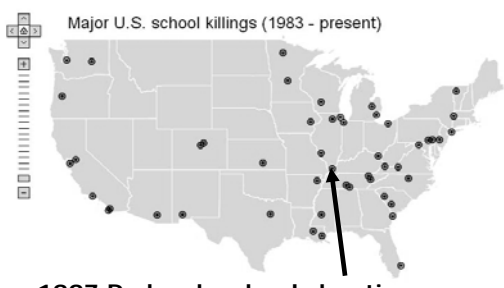
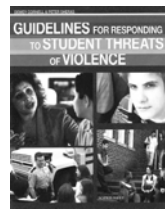
Dewey G. Cornell, Ph. D., is a forensic clinical psychologist and Professor of Education in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. Dr. Cornell is Director of the UVA Youth Violence Project and a faculty associate of the Institute of Law, Psychiatry, and Public Policy.

Dr. Cornell has studied youth violence for over 20 years and has assisted numerous schools in the development of violence prevention programs. He has authored more than 100 publications in psychology and education, including two recent books: *Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence* and *School Violence: Fears versus Facts*.



# Overview

1. Rationale for threat assessment
2. Threat assessment guidelines
3. Behavioral pathways to violence
4. Research findings
5. Case exercises



1997 Paducah school shooting

This graphic contains nationally reported killings in K-12 schools and colleges. Source: USA TODAY, Associated Press, School Shootings (Cited From 2008). Credit: Chad Allender, William Covich, Jack Ollum, May Cadden, Bill Conley, USA TODAY

# Three students killed, 5 wounded in shooting



McCracken police: Boy, 14, opened fire on prayer circle

**BY JERRY HANCOCK**  
 The Courier-Journal

DECATUR, Ky. — A 14-year-old student opened fire on a prayer circle at a high school in McCracken County, Ky., on Monday, killing three students and wounding five others. The shooting occurred at 10:30 a.m. in a prayer circle held by students and staff members. The 14-year-old shooting suspect, who took the time to get to the high school before opening fire, had several classmates among his targets. The shooting occurred in the prayer circle, but the victim was not in the prayer circle and did not report the shooting to school officials. The victim has been identified as Michael Cornell.

Attendees moved one of the students hurt in yesterday's shooting at South High School to an ambulance. A 14-year-old freshman was arrested and charged in the deaths of three students. Five others were wounded at the school west of Paducah.



- Contributing Factors**
- Underachievement
  - Bullying and teasing
  - Developing mental illness
    - Paranoid fears
    - Voices
  - Peer encouragement
  - Media encouragement
  - Available guns

### Carneal pleads guilty in shootings

An officer led Michael Carneal, left, to a police car waiting outside the Buchanan County Courthouse after Carneal pleaded guilty last month to the murder of three students in a shooting at Heath High School.

A guard watched as Michael Carneal gave an interview at the Kentucky State Reformatory, Prison 10 in "muddy death beds," Carneal said.

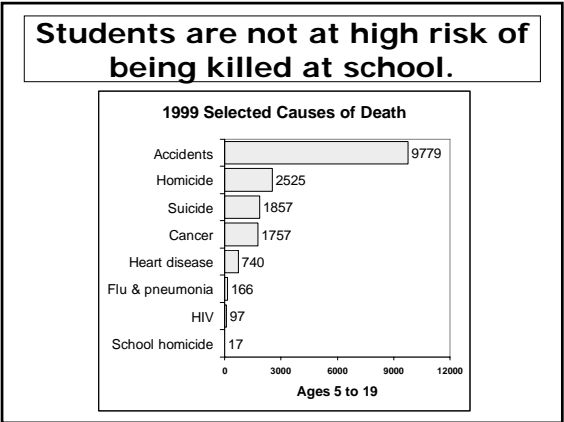
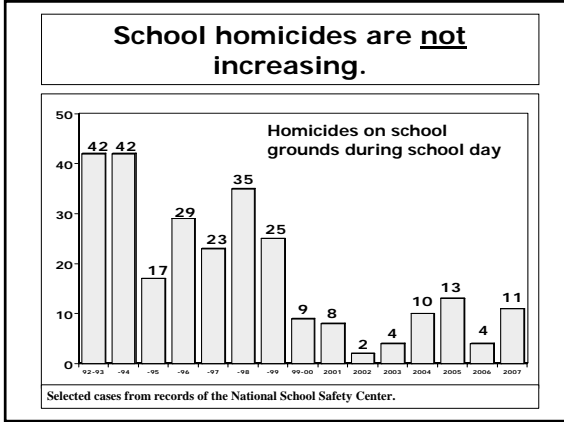
**THE SHOOTING RAMPAGE**  
 "I never looked at who I was shooting. I didn't know who was shot until I read about it in the paper. . . People want one simple answer (for the attack) — I can't."

**SUICIDE ATTEMPTS**  
 "I thought if I killed myself I would make the world a better place. . . I can't change anything that happened, by dying or anything else. I wish I could change things, but I can't."

September 2002, Age 19

### Media-Inflamed Fear of School Violence

MASSACRE IN COLORADO . . . IN SORROW AND DISBELIEF  
**Newsweek**  
**Why?** THE MONSTERS NEXT DOOR  
 PORTRAITS OF THE KILLERS THE SCIENCE OF TEEN VIOLENCE  
 TEEN VIOLENCE WILD IN THE STREETS  
 WHAT MADE THEM DO IT?  
 BLOOD EVERYWHERE!  
 THESE ARE COLD-BLOODED, EVIL CHILDREN



### What is the likelihood of a student committing a homicide at your school?

- **93** student homicides cases in 10 years = 9.3/year (1992-93 to 2001-02)
- **119,000** schools
- **119,000 ÷ 9.3/year =**
- **1 case every 12,796 years**

## Problems for Europe to Avoid

1. Over-emphasis on security measures and crisis response
2. Excessive punishment to deter others (zero tolerance)
3. Student profiling and warning signs

## Fear-based Reactions to Shootings

*Prevention cannot wait until the gunman is at the door.*

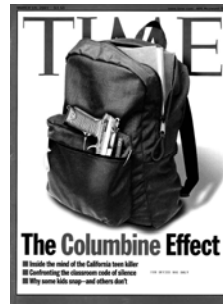


## Fear-based Reactions to Shootings

- Security guards
- Metal detectors
- Alarm systems
- Door locks
- Video cameras
- Shooter drills



## The Expansion of Zero Tolerance



From No Guns to

- No Toy Guns
- No Nail clippers
- No Plastic utensils
- No Finger-pointing
- No Jokes
- No Drawings
- No Rubber band shooting

*No Accidental violations*

## The disconnect between youth violence and school safety practices

**Cub Scout utensil gets boy, 6, school suspension**  
First-grader brought it to eat his lunch with; now he's facing reform school

By Mike Celis  
TODAYShow.com contributor  
updated 58 minutes ago

Dressed in a button-down shirt and tie and speaking calmly and articulately, first-grader Zachary Christie hardly looks or acts like the sort of kid who should be spending 45 days in reform school. But, thanks to a zero-tolerance policy, that's where Zachary's Delaware school system wants him to go after he made the mistake of taking his favorite camping utensil to



If fork, spoon, has been got it to take it. "He eats rything else, so i would have a 6-year-old's MAM's Meredith

**Search**  
Cub First-grader suspended over camping utensil  
Out: 13 6-year-old Zachary Christie was suspended after he brought a camping utensil to school. TODAY's Meredith Vieira talks to Zachary, his mother, Debbie, and her fiance, Lee Irving, about the incident.  
Today show

## The disconnect between youth violence and school safety practices

### 5-Year-Old Handcuffed by Florida Police

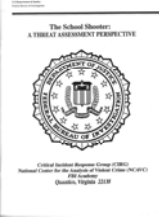


*Girl Was Misbehaving*

April 14, 2005; NBC10 News




## FBI Recommends Against Profiling



“One response to the pressure for action may be an effort to identify the next shooter by developing a “profile” of the typical school shooter. This may sound like a reasonable preventive measure, but in practice, trying to draw up a catalogue or “checklist” of warning signs to detect a potential school shooter can be shortsighted, even dangerous. Such lists, publicized by the media, can end up unfairly labeling many nonviolent students as potentially dangerous or even lethal. In fact, a great many adolescents who will never commit violent acts will show some of the behaviors or personality traits included on the list.” (FBI report pp 2-3)

**Download at**  
[www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)

## Profiling



## What is Criminal Profiling?

**Multiple terms and definitions**


**1. Retrospective profiling**

- ✓ Crime has occurred
- ✓ Analysis of crime scene
- ✓ Infer characteristics of offender

## Another Form of Profiling


**2. Prospective profiling**

- ✓ No crime has occurred
- ✓ Checklist of possible characteristics
- ✓ Speculate about future behavior





Jomelle Singh, WSO of TSA Security

## School Profiling




## APA Warning Signs Brochure

WARNING SIGNS



fight for your rights  
take a stand against violence




***"If you see these immediate warning signs, violence is a serious possibility."***

1. Loss of temper on a daily basis
2. Significant vandalism or property damage
3. Increase in use of drugs or alcohol
4. Increase in risk-taking behavior
5. Detailed plans to commit acts of violence
6. Announcing threats or plans for hurting others
7. Enjoying hurting animals
8. Carrying a weapon

### Federal Warning Signs


1. Social withdrawal
2. Excessive feelings of isolation
3. Excessive feelings of rejection
4. Being a victim of violence
5. Feelings of being picked on & persecuted
6. Low school interest/poor academic performance
7. Violence in writings/drawings
8. Uncontrolled anger
9. Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying behavior
10. History of discipline problems
11. Past history of violent and aggressive behavior
12. Intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes
13. Drug use and alcohol use
14. Affiliation with gangs
15. Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms
16. Serious threats of violence




### Profiling does not work.

- School shootings are too rare.
- Profiles make false predictions.
- Profiles generate stereotypes.
- Profiles don't solve problems.

### Red Lake Shooting




- Teasing and bullying
- Preoccupation with violence overlooked
- Threats were ignored
- Peer support for violence
- Peers did not seek help



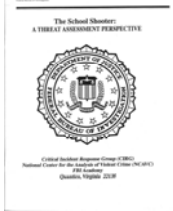
### Teach students to distinguish snitching from seeking help

**Snitching:** informing on someone for personal gain

**Seeking help:** attempting to stop someone from being hurt




### FBI Recommends Threat Assessment Approach



“Although the risk of an actual shooting incident at any one school is very low, threats of violence are potentially a problem at any school. Once a threat is made, having a fair, rational, and standardized method of evaluating and responding to threats is critically important.” (FBI report p 1)

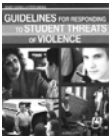
Download at [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)



**Secret Service/DOE Recommendations:**

- Create a planning team to develop a threat assessment program.
- Identify roles for school personnel.
- Clarify role of law enforcement.
- Conduct threat assessments of students who make threats of violence.

Download at: [www.secretservice.gov](http://www.secretservice.gov)




## Session 2

Threat assessment Guidelines

1. **Decision-free process and team approach**
2. **Transient threats of violence**
3. **Serious Substantive threats of violence**
4. **Very Serious Substantive threats of violence**

## Threat Assessment

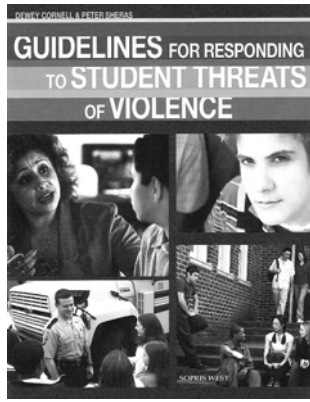
1. *Identification* of threats made by students.
2. *Evaluation* of seriousness of threat and danger it poses to others, recognizing that all threats are not the same (e.g., toy guns are not dangerous).
3. *Intervention* to reduce risk of violence.
4. *Follow-up* to assess intervention results.



## Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence

A collaborative project of:  
 University of Virginia Curry School of Education  
 Albemarle County Public Schools  
 Charlottesville City Public Schools

Funded by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund



- Legally defensible procedures for responding to student threats
- Step-by-step guidelines and decision-free
- Research-based and field-tested
- Covers K-12, regular and special education

Available from [sopriswest.com](http://sopriswest.com)

## Team roles

Principal or Assistant Principal	Leads team, conducts Step 1.
School Resource Officer	Advises team, responds to illegal actions and emergencies.
Mental Health Staff (School counselors, psychologists, social workers)	Team member to conduct mental health assessments.
	Team member to take lead role in follow-up interventions.
<b>Not required to serve on team</b> Teachers, aides, other staff	Report threats, provide input to team. No additional workload.

School divisions may further specify team roles and include other staff to meet local needs.

## Field-Test Schools

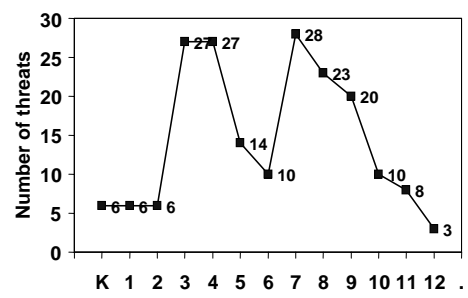
- 22 Elementary schools
- 6 Middle schools
- 4 High schools
- 3 Alternative schools
- 35 Total**

### What is a threat?

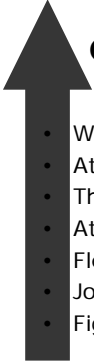
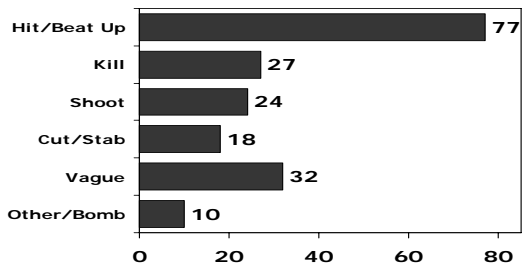
*A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone.*

Threats may be spoken, written, or gestured.  
 Threats may be direct or indirect, and need not be communicated to the intended victim or victims. ("I'm going to get him.")  
 Weapon possession is presumed to be a threat unless circumstances clearly indicate otherwise. ("I forgot my knife was in my backpack.")  
 When in doubt, assume it is a threat.

### Grade Levels for 188 Student Threats of Violence



### What did the students threaten to do?

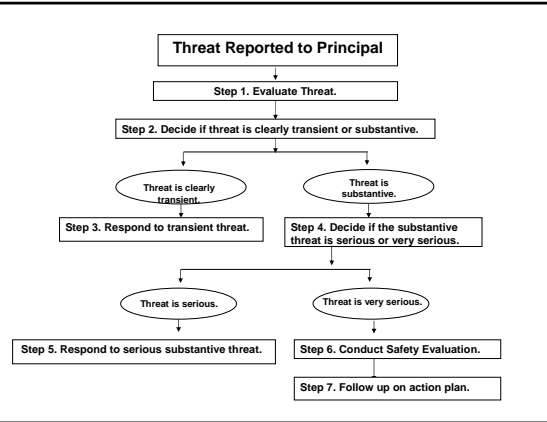


### Continuum of Threats

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

### No Magic Formula or Crystal Ball

There is no formula, prescription, or checklist that will predict or prevent all violent acts. School authorities must make reasoned judgments based on the facts of each individual situation, and monitor situations over time.



## Step 1. Evaluate the threat.

- Obtain an account of the threat and the context from the student and witnesses.
- Write down the exact threat.
- Obtain student's explanation of the threat's meaning and his/her intentions.
- Obtain witness perceptions of the threat's meaning.

Document your evaluation.

## Typical Questions

1. Do you know why I wanted to talk to you?
2. What happened today when you were [place of incident]?
3. What exactly did you say and do?
4. What did you mean when you said/did that?
5. How do you think [person threatened] feels about what you said?
6. What was the reason you said that?
7. What you going to do now?



## Witness Questions

1. What happened today when you were [place of incident]?
2. What exactly did [student who made threat] say and do?
3. What do you think he/she meant?
4. How do you feel about what he/she said?
5. Why did he/she say that?



## Step 2. Transient or Substantive?

- Determine whether the threat is transient or substantive.
- The critical issue is not what the student threatened to do, but whether the student intends to carry out the threat.
- When in doubt, treat a threat as substantive.

## Transient threats

- Often are rhetorical remarks, not genuine expressions of intent to harm.
- At worst, express temporary feelings of anger or frustration.
- Usually can be resolved on the scene or in the office.
- After resolution, the threat no longer exists.
- Usually end with an apology or clarification.

## Substantive threats

- Express intent to physically injure someone beyond the immediate situation.
- There is at least some risk the student will carry out the threat.
- Require that you take protective action, including warning intended victims and parents.
- May be legal violations and require police consultation.
- When in doubt, treat threats as substantive.

## Substantive threats: Factors to consider

- Age of student
- Capability of student to carry out the threat
- Student's discipline history
- Credibility of student and willingness to acknowledge his or her behavior
- Credibility of witness accounts
- When in doubt, treat threats as substantive.

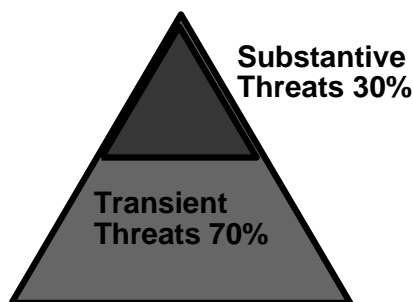
## Presumptive indicators of substantive threats

- Specific, plausible details. ("I am going to blast Mr. Johnson with my pistol.")
- Threat has been repeated over time. ("He's been telling everyone he is going to get you.")
- Threat reported as a plan ("Wait until you see what happens next Tuesday in the library.")
- Accomplices or recruitment of accomplices.
- Physical evidence of intent (written plans, lists of victims, bomb materials, etc.)

## Case examples: Transient or substantive threat?

1. Two elementary students to throw paper wads pretending to bomb one another.
2. Two middle school students get in a shoving match. One says, "I'm gonna bust you up."
3. A boy turns in an English essay that describes an especially violent scene from a war.
4. Two students get into a fight. After they are separated, both are sullen and quiet.
5. A student says he is being bullied. He was warned that if he told anyone, they would beat him up.

## Transient versus substantive threats



## Step 3. Responses to a transient threat.

- No need to take safety precautions.
- See that threat is resolved through explanation, apology, making amends.
- Provide counseling and education where appropriate.
- Administer discipline if appropriate.

## Transient Case Steps

### Step 1. Evaluate the threat.

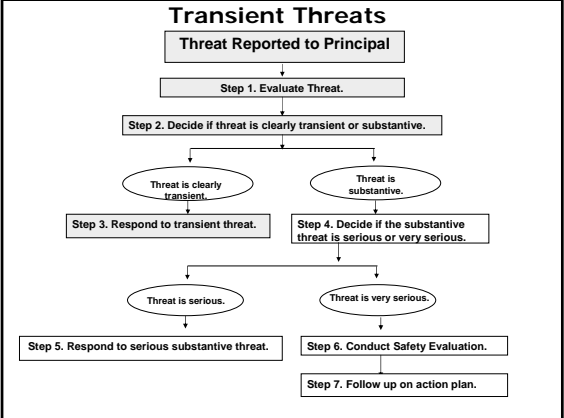
- Obtain a specific account of the threat by interviewing the student who made threat, the intended victim, and other witnesses.
- Write down the exact content of threat and statements by each party.
- Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the student's intentions.

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

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

### Step 3. Respond to transient threat.

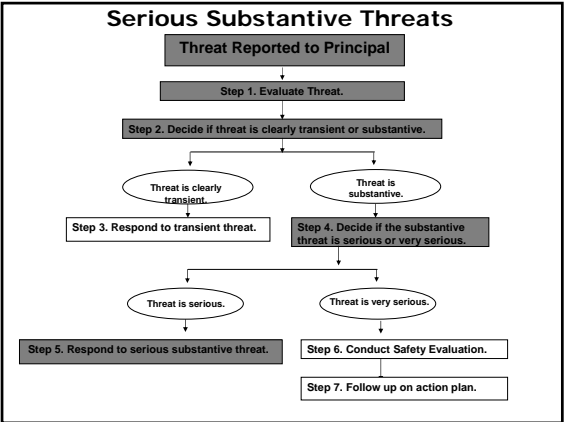
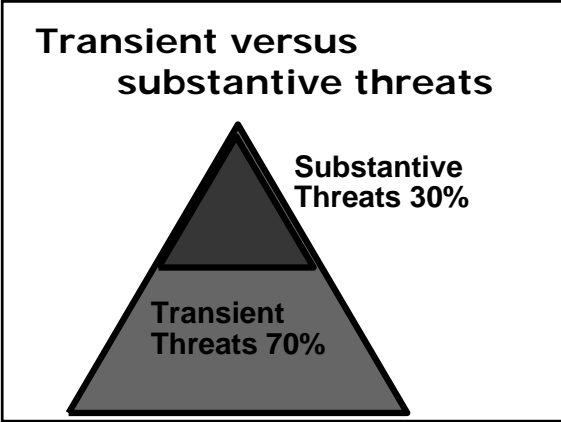
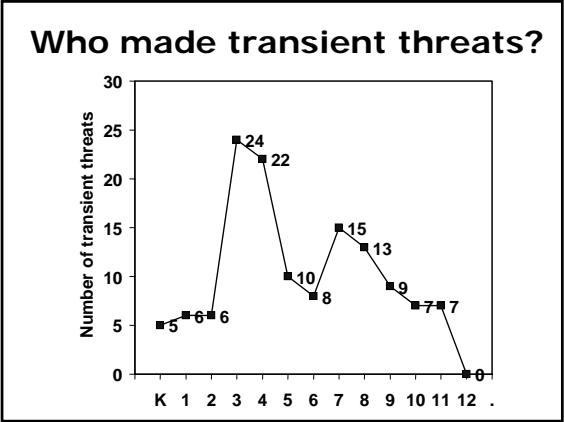
- Typical responses may include reprimand, parental notification, or other disciplinary action.
- Student may need to make amends and attend mediation or counseling.



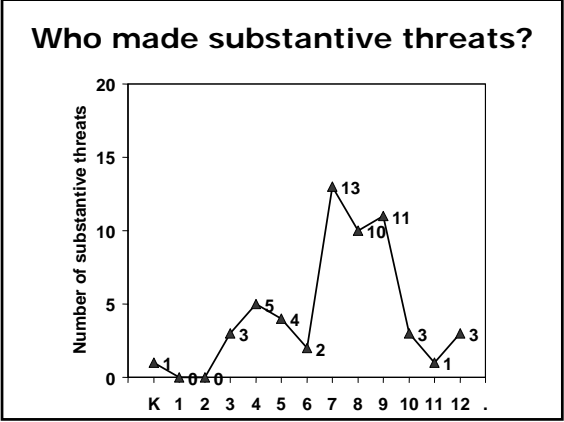

**Key Point**

*Threat assessment and discipline are separate processes.*

*A threat that requires serious disciplinary consequences (such as a bomb threat) might not be a serious (substantive) threat.*



- ### Step 4. Serious or very serious substantive threat?
- Substantive assault threats are classified **serious**. ("I'm gonna beat him up.")
  - Substantive threats to kill, rape, or inflict very serious injury are classified **very serious**. ("I'm gonna break his arm.")
  - Substantive threats involving a weapon are classified **very serious**.



### Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.

- Take precautions to protect potential victims. May consult with law enforcement.
- Notify intended victim and victim's parents.
- Notify student's parents.
- Discipline student for threat.
- Determine appropriate intervention for student, such as counseling or dispute mediation.
- Follow up to verify that threat has been resolved and interventions in progress.

### Substantive Case Steps

**Step 1. Evaluate the threat.**

- Interview the student who made threat and any witnesses.
- Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made, the student's intentions, and the victims' interpretations of the threat.

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

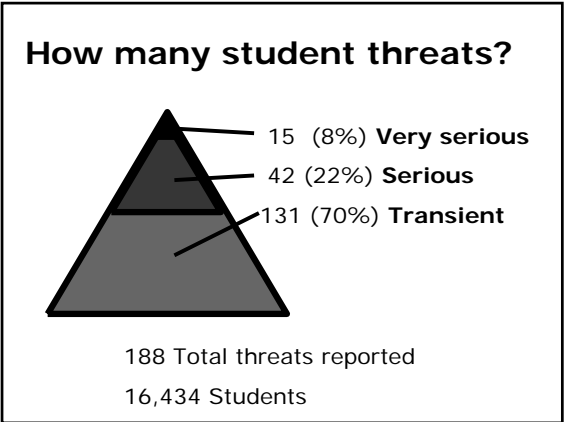
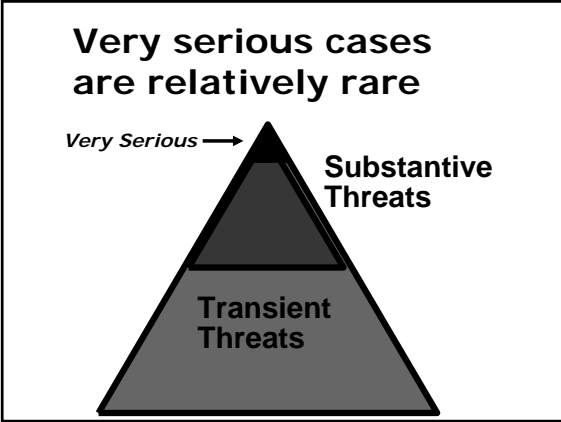
- Does the student express remorse and retract the threat?
- Is the student willing to make amends or resolve the conflict?
- What is the student's history of discipline problems?

**Step 4. Decide whether the threat is serious or very serious.**

- Did this threat involve a weapon, or a threat to kill, rape, or inflict severe injury?

**Step 5. Respond to the serious substantive threat.**

- Take protective action by notifying parents of perpetrator and victims.
- Take disciplinary action consistent with school policy.
- Identify any other student support or intervention needs.



### Step 6. Conduct a Safety Evaluation for a Very Serious Substantive Threat.

Safety Evaluation conducted by a team.

- Principal leads the team.
- School psychologist or other mental health professional conducts Mental Health Assessment.
- School resource officer consults on legal issues.
- School counselor leads intervention planning.



*In a threat assessment, we try to determine **why** a student made a threat, and therefore how we can **prevent the threat from being carried out.***

### **Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade John**

- 8<sup>th</sup> grade John reported by another student to have a hit list.
- Tells former girlfriend, "I'm gonna get even with you and all your friends by blowing you all away with a shotgun."
- John denies hit list or threatening statement. Later acknowledges anger at several classmates and at Alice, his former girlfriend.

### **Immediate responses to a Very Serious Substantive Threat**

- Take precautions to protect potential victims.
- Consult with law enforcement promptly.
- Notify intended victim and victim's parents.
- Notify student's parents.
- Begin Mental Health Assessment.
- Determine safety during suspension.

### **Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade John**

- Principal contacted SRO. They inquire about John's access to firearms.
- Parents summoned to school. John is suspended, referred for evaluation.
- Parents of victims are informed of threat, reassured about school's actions.

### **11 Key Questions**

Abridged from the Secret Service/DOE Guide

1. What are the student's motives or goals?
2. Any communications of intent to attack?
3. Any inappropriate interest in other attacks, weapons, or mass violence?
4. Any attack-related behaviors? Making a plan, acquiring weapons, casing sites, etc.
5. Does student have capacity to attack?

### **11 Key Questions (cont.)**

Abridged from the Secret Service/DOE Guide

6. Is there hopelessness or despair?
7. Any trusting relationship with an adult?
8. Is violence regarded as way to solve a problem? Any peer influences?
9. Are student's words consistent with actions?
10. Are others concerned about student?
11. What circumstances might trigger violence?

### Law Enforcement Investigation of Very Serious Substantive Threats

- Interview suspects and witnesses.
- Conduct searches for weapons and other evidence of planning.
- Serve as a resource for students with fears or information to share.
- Take appropriate protective action.



### Mental Health Assessment

- Not a prediction model.
- Identify any mental health needs.
- Identify reasons why threat was made.
- Propose strategies for reducing risk.

### Sources of information for mental health assessment

Mental health professional will interview:

- Student
- Intended victim/witnesses
- Student's parent
- School staff who know student (including SRO, school counselor, teachers)
- Outside professionals who know student

### Mental Health Assessment FAQ's

- **Parental Permission?** – not required in emergency, but otherwise necessary
- **Testing?** – use if clinically indicated, to supplement interviews
- **External evaluations?** – Not a substitute for evaluation by trained school staff



***Threat assessments do NOT require referral to a mental health professional outside the school. Outside referrals are optional. Inside professionals have essential inside knowledge.***

### Student Interview

- Review of threat and relationship with victim
- Stress and situational factors, family support
- Mental health symptoms (depression, psychosis, severe anxiety, or suicidality)
- Access to firearms
- Previous aggressive and delinquent behavior, exposure to violence
- Peer relations and social adjustment
- Coping and strengths
- Bullying and victimization experiences

## Beginning the student interview

- “Do you know why I wanted to meet with you today?”
- Explain purpose of interview to understand what happened, why it happened, and what should be done to resolve the problem.
- Information will be shared with school staff who will be deciding what to do about the problem.  
**No promise of confidentiality.**
- This is the student’s opportunity to tell his/her side of the story and have a voice in what is decided.



Key Point

***Interviews conducted as part of a threat assessment are NOT confidential.***

## Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade John

- John describes feeling rejected by Alice, teased by other boys.
- John admits hit list. Denies intent to hurt anyone. “They was messing with me and I was messing back.”
- John is willing to attend mediation sessions.

## Parent interview

- Parent knowledge of threat
- Current stressors, family relations, childhood history
- Recent behavior and mental health
- School adjustment
- Peer relations and bullying
- History of aggressive and delinquent behavior, exposure to violence, access to weapons
- Willingness to assist in a safety plan
- Parent attitude toward school and Law enforcement

## Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade John

- John’s mother reports that John was treated for depression, stopped his medication a few months ago.
- John is stressed over parental separation and conflict.
- John does not have history of violence, does not have ready access to firearms.

### Mental Health Assessment Report Template

#### Identifying Information

Give the student’s name, age, grade, school, and other relevant identifying information.

#### Reason for Referral

State that this evaluation was requested by the school principal because the student made a threat of violence that was judged to be a very serious, substantive threat. Describe the threat, including the exact statement or threatening behavior, and where and when it took place.

#### Sources of Information

Describe how the child presented and any important aspects of his or her mental state, including any indications of mental disorder. Identify any stressors, conflicts, or unmet needs that affect the child’s functioning or bear on the threat incident.

#### Major Findings

Describe how the child presented and any important aspects of his or her mental state, including any indications of mental disorder. Identify any stressors, conflicts, or unmet needs that affect the child’s functioning or bear on the threat incident.

Review the child’s understanding of the threat and its meaning from his or her perspective. Note whether the child has a history of violent or aggressive behavior, and any findings from the assessment that raise concern about the child’s potential for violence, such as access to firearms, peer encouragement to fight, drug use, or inadequate home supervision.

#### Recommendations

In general, the mental health professional should not be expected to make a definitive statement that a child is or is not dangerous: such statements go beyond current knowledge in the field of risk assessment. The report may identify risk factors and protective factors, and express concerns where there appear to be compelling risk factors. More importantly, the report should present recommendations for reducing the risk of violence, and it is the nature of these recommendations that should convey the nature and degree of concern about the potential for violence. In all cases, the goal is to reduce the risk of violence rather than predict violence. Recommendations may include a wide range of strategies, but should address both any immediate safety needs to protect potential victims and broader efforts to resolve conflicts or problems that precipitated the threat.

**Behavior Support Plan**

For use with:  
 • IEP  
 • 504 plan  
 • Any student

The BIP addresses the student's learning or the learning of others.  
 BIP date: \_\_\_\_\_ BIP plan date: \_\_\_\_\_ BIP review date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Student name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Teacher name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 1. The behavior needing change: \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. It requires handling because: \_\_\_\_\_  
 3. It should be a BIP if \_\_\_\_\_  
 4. Progress indicator or baseline of behavior: \_\_\_\_\_  
 5. Reported by: \_\_\_\_\_  
 6. Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_

**PART 2: PREVENTION – ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND NEEDED CHANGES**

1. What are the conditions for the behavior situation in which the behavior is likely to occur? \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. What supports the student using the positive behavior? (What is existing or what needs changing in the environment or individual?) \_\_\_\_\_  
 3. How can the student be supported to use the positive behavior? \_\_\_\_\_  
 4. What environmental changes, strategies, and supports are recommended to increase the student's skills in the classroom? \_\_\_\_\_  
 5. Who will monitor the plan? \_\_\_\_\_  
 6. Who will evaluate the plan? \_\_\_\_\_

## Step 7.

### Follow up with action plan.

- Determine action plan to reduce risk of violence.
- Identify appropriate interventions for student.
- Schedule follow-up contact with student to assess current risk and update plan.
- Document plan in Safety Evaluation Report.

### Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade John

- John returns to outpatient treatment. Parents recognize impact of their conflict on John.
- Dispute with boys is investigated. John attends mediation sessions with other students. Mutual apologies are given.
- John meets with SRO, agrees to report further problems to him. School counselor establishes relationship.

### Threat Documentation Form

**Threat Assessment Documentation**

This form provides a systematic process for threat assessment responses to student threats of violence. It is designed to be used by school staff to document and respond to threats of violence.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School: \_\_\_\_\_ District: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Type of threat: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Who reported threat: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Who assessed threat: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Who reviewed threat: \_\_\_\_\_

**Threat Assessment**

1. The student is capable of acting on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. The student has the intent to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 3. The student has the ability to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 4. The student has the opportunity to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 5. The student has the resources to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 6. The student has the motivation to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 7. The student has the knowledge to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 8. The student has the skills to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 9. The student has the information to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 10. The student has the access to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 11. The student has the opportunity to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 12. The student has the resources to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 13. The student has the motivation to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 14. The student has the knowledge to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 15. The student has the skills to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_  
 16. The student has the information to act on the threat. \_\_\_\_\_

This form may be photocopied.

### Typical Threat 1

- An angry student says “I’m gonna kill you” to a classmate.
- What do you do?

### Typical Threat 1

- On interview, the student says he has no plans to harm the classmate and that he just lost his temper. He offers to apologize.
- What kind of threat?

## Typical Threat 2

- A student tells a friend that he is going to beat up Joe in the back parking lot after school today. The friend tells you.
- What do you do?

## Typical Threat 2

- On interview, the student denies making such a statement. He says that what he does after school is his own business.
- What kind of threat?

## Typical Threat 3

- A student sends an email threatening to "blow away the preps" at school. When interviewed, the boy says he has a right to free speech. He has a history of discipline problems and students say they are worried.
- What kind of threat?
- What do you do?

## Typical Threat 3

- A student sends an email threatening to "blow away the preps" at school. When interviewed, the boy says he has a right to free speech. He has a history of discipline problems and students say they are worried.
- This threat is **substantive** because it cannot be easily resolved. It is **very serious** because it involves a threat to kill.

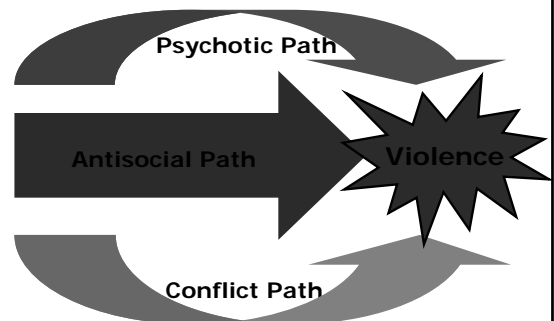


## Session 3

Behavioral Pathways to Violence

1. Antisocial pathways
2. Conflict pathways
3. Psychotic pathways

## 3 Pathways to Violent Behavior



### Antisocial Path



- Instrumental crimes
- Under-controlled aggression
- Antisocial peers
- Delinquent history
- Early childhood problems
- School discipline history

### Antisocial Path: Response



- Parent alliance & training
- Separation from antisocial peers
- Engage in prosocial activities
- Juvenile court involvement
- Probably not special ed eligible

### Conflicted path



- Reactive violence of victims
- Over-controlled hostility
- Few previous overt behavior problems
- Over-sensitive to shame
- Intense need for approval, status
- Suicidality

### Conflicted path: Response



- Parent awareness of problem
- Assess for depression
- Address bullying or other peer problems
- Supportive counseling, adult mentor

### Bullying motivated many of the school shootings

**Pearl, Miss.**  
 "The school has arranged an...  
 A.P. 20-20-04. (The was used)

**West Paducah, Ky.**  
 "Three girls were killed when...  
 A.P. 20-04. (The was used)

**Stamps, Ark.**  
 "Eighty-one students...  
 A.P. 20-04. (The was used)

**Robert Bechtel, 22, Surrendered In Swarthmore 'Rage' Murder**  
 "Swarthmore College...  
 Shooting Victim"

### Dormitory Murder at Swarthmore College

- Honor student
- Poor family
- Teased by peers
- Shooting spree in dorm
- One student killed



## Dormitory Murder at Swarthmore College

- Found NRG1
- 5 years in hospital
- 1967 Ph.D. Psychology Univ of Kansas
- Married, 2 daughters
- Professor, Univ Arizona



## Psychotic Youth



- Delusional motive
- Auditory hallucinations
- Substance abuse
- Resentment over mistreatment
- Alienation from peers
- Odd behaviors

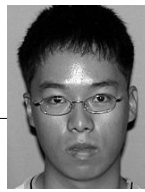
## Psychotic Youth: Response



- Parent education about mental illness
- Medication and counseling
- Special education evaluation
- Close monitoring for delusional ideas, paranoid beliefs, thoughts of violence



## Seung-Hui Cho



### Caveats

- Incomplete information
  - Governor's Review Panel report
  - Report to President Bush
  - Media accounts
  - School staff
- No direct assessment
- No definite conclusions
- Purpose: to show the long course of severe mental illness leading to violence

## Seung-Hui Cho

### Main Reports

1. Governor's Review Panel Report  
<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/TempContent/techPanelReport-docs/FullReport.pdf>
2. VA Tech Internal Review  
<http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/story.php?relyear=2007&itemno=459>
3. Report to President Bush on Virginia Tech  
<http://www.hhs.gov/vtreport.html>

## Seung-Hui Cho



### College Writing Class

- Fall 2005 Professor concerned with violent writing, withdrawn behavior. In paper wrote about other students in class, *"I don't know which uncouth, low-life planet you come from but you disgust me. In fact, you all disgust me... You low-life barbarians make me sick to the stomach that I wanna barf over my new shoes. If you despicable human beings. . . keep this up, before you know it you will turn into cannibals-eating little babies, your friends. I hope y'all burn in hell for mass murdering and eating all those little animals."*
- Students afraid to come to class. Photographing classmates with camera under desk. Professor refused to teach him. Removed from class, refuses counseling, Care Team reviews case.

## Seung-Hui Cho

### College Stalking

- Nov 2005 Female students report Cho for stalking, IMs with strange aliases, going to room in disguise. Referred to Judicial Affairs, phone screening with counseling center.
- Dec 2005 Police tell him no contact with female student. Sent IM to suitemate "I might as well kill myself now." Police take to CSB, where hospitalized as "imminent danger to self or others." Diagnosed mood disorder NOS.

## Seung-Hui Cho



### College Hospitalization

- Dec 2005 After overnight hosp stay, not seen as danger to self or others, so released by court but ordered to outpt treatment. Goes to college counseling center, seen as not psychotic. Does not return.
- April 2006 Professor concerned about his writing, Cho was angry and was asked to leave office.
- Spring 2006 Creative writing about man who hates students, plans to kill them and himself.

## Seung-Hui Cho



### College Year 4

Fall 2006 Professor contacts dean, but dean finds no mention of mental health issues or police reports. Professor encourages counseling, which Cho declines. By now, 6 professors have expressed concern about Cho.

## Seung-Hui Cho



### Prior to Attack

- Feb 2007 orders handgun online
- Mar 2007 rents van, buys 2<sup>nd</sup> gun, background check fails, practices, buys ammo
- April 8 videotapes manifesto in hotel
- April 13 bomb threats at 3 halls
- April 14 Asian male seen in hood, door reported chained, more ammo bought
- April 15 normal phone call to family

## Va Tech Review Panel

Report to the Governor

### Selected Recommendations

11-2 Virginia Tech and other institutions of higher learning should have a **threat assessment team** that includes representatives from law enforcement, human resources, student and academic affairs, legal counsel, and mental health functions. (p. 32)

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/TempContent/techPanelReport-docs/FullReport.pdf>

Download at  
<http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu/>  
 or  
<http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/vcss/ocps/?menuLevel=11&mlD=18>

# Session 4

Research findings

1. Initial field test
2. Memphis study
3. Virginia high school study

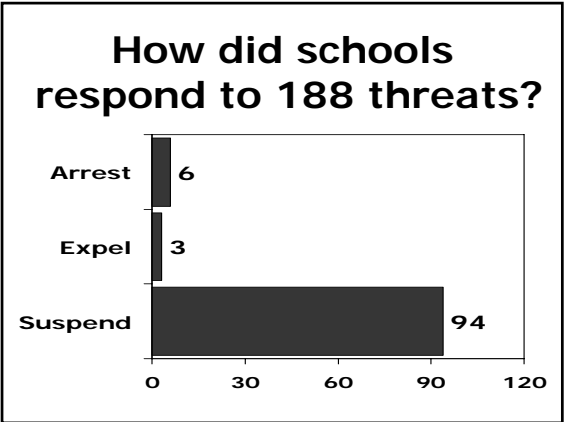
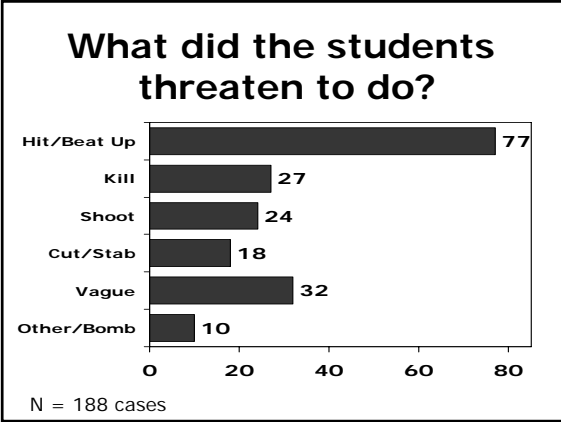
School Psychology Review, 2004, Volume 33, No. 4, pp. 527-546

### Guidelines for Student Threat Assessment: Field-Test Findings

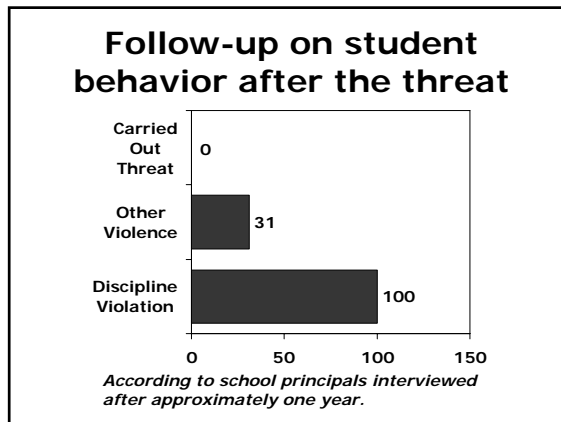
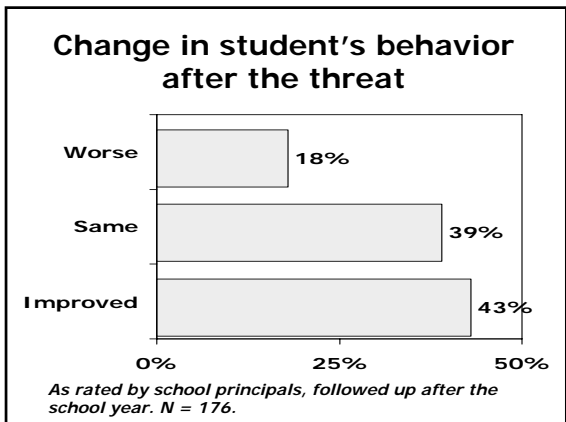

Dewey G. Cornell, Peter L. Sheras, Sebastian Kaplan, David McConville, Julia Douglas, Andrea Eiken, Lela McKnight, Chris Benson, and Joanna Cole

Programs in Clinical and School Psychology, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia

*School Psychology Review, 2004*



- ### Follow-up interviews on student threats
- Interviews conducted with school principals at end of school year and again the following fall.
  - Follow-up time periods averaged 148 days until end of school year.
  - Four students did not return to school after the threat, 17 left within 30 days after threat.

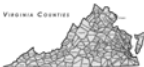



## Memphis Field-Trial

Memphis Public Schools resolved 209 threats in 194 schools, including 110 threats to kill, shoot, or stab.

- 5 permanent expulsions, 3 incarcerations
- Office referrals declined >50%
- No reports of any threats carried out

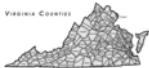
*Behavioral Disorders, 2008*



## Virginia High School Threat Assessment Study

- 95 high schools using the UVA threat assessment model
- 131 using locally developed models
- 54 not using threat assessment

*School Psychology Quarterly, 2009*

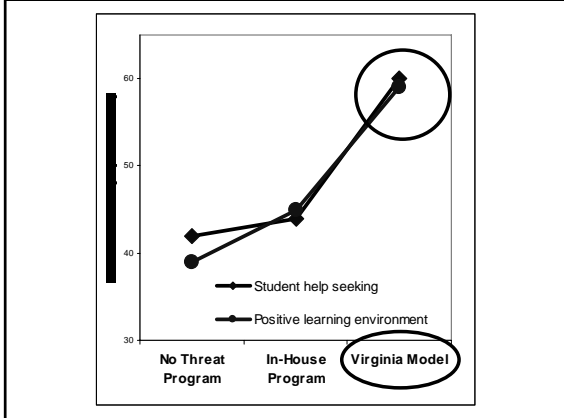
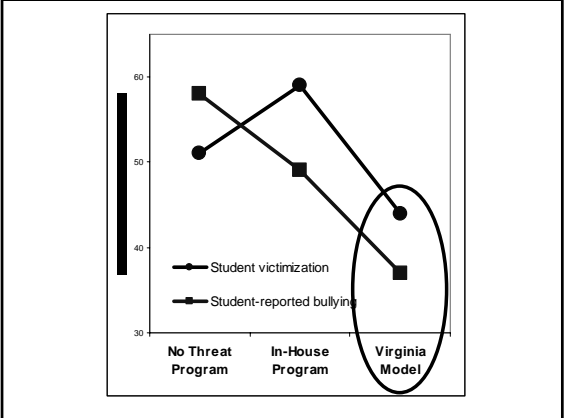


## Virginia High School Threat Assessment Study

- School climate survey of randomly selected samples of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in each school:
  - Bullying observed in school
  - Victimization experienced in school
  - Willingness to seek help
  - Positive learning environment

## Sample Items for Each Scale

- Bullying observed in school  
 “Bullying is a problem at this school.”
- Victimization experienced in school  
 “I was physically attacked” (this year in school).
- Willingness to seek help  
 “If another student brought a gun to school, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.”
- Positive learning environment  
 “Adults at this school ...treat all students fairly.”



### Virginia High School Threat Assessment Study

**Findings for Virginia Model Schools**

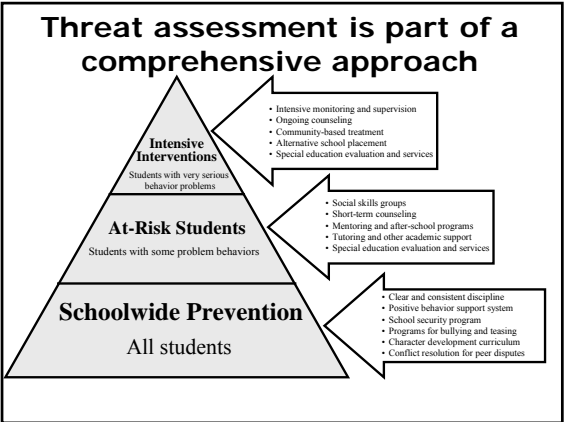
- Less bullying and other victimization
- Greater student willingness to seek help
- Perceive adults as more caring and fair
- Fewer long-term suspensions

Controlled for school size, poverty, minority %, school security measures, and neighborhood violent crime.

*School Psychology Quarterly, 2009*

### Research Needs

- Controlled studies comparing schools with and without threat assessment.
- Research on threat context and student characteristics.
- More follow-up studies of threat outcomes.
- Identification of effective threat prevention efforts (e.g., bullying reduction).



<http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu>

### Virginia Youth Violence Project

Effective methods for youth violence prevention and school safety

**Aggressive Discipline Violations in Virginia High Schools**

4 or 5 violations  
4 or 6 violations  
7 or more violations

**Violence in Schools**

National statistics  
Virginia statistics  
College campus violence  
School shootings decline  
School violence myths  
School crisis response resources  
Do we need zero tolerance?  
The school safety issue

**Threat Assessment**

Training available  
What is student threat assessment?  
Study shows threat assessment works  
Our threat assessment manual  
Sample threats  
Special education and threats  
Evaluations of our training  
Talking to children about terrorism

College Threat Assessment Project

## Model Regulations for Conducting a Threat Assessment

### I. PURPOSE

To establish procedures for conducting threat assessments in response to student threats of violence.

### II. DEFINITIONS

- A. A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, written, or gestured. An expression of intent to harm someone is considered a threat regardless of whether it is communicated to an actual or prospective victim and regardless of whether the actual or prospective victim is aware the threat existing in any fashion, whether orally, visually, in writing, or electronically. A threat assessment is a procedure to identify potentially dangerous or violent situations and resolve them.
- B. A transient threat is a threat that does not express a lasting intent to harm someone. A threat is transient only if it can be quickly and easily resolved and no longer exists.
- C. A serious substantive threat is a threat that expresses a continuing intent to assault someone.
- D. A very serious substantive threat is a threat that involves using a weapon or a threat to kill, rape, or inflict severe injury to someone.

### III. PROCEDURES

- A. A threat assessment may be conducted if a student makes an explicit or implicit threat, or if the student's behavior indicates that a threat is reasonably likely. The goal of the threat assessment is to provide assistance to the student being assessed, to support victims or potential victims, and to take appropriate preventive or corrective measures to maintain a safe and secure school environment. A threat assessment is not a disciplinary action, and is not a prerequisite to disciplinary action. Documents completed as part of a threat assessment may or may not be used in a disciplinary proceeding.
- B. Student threats shall be reported to the school administrator (principal, assistant principal, or principal designee) if they cannot be easily and readily resolved by other staff. Criteria for reporting threats should include the age of the child and the context of the threat or remark.
- C. The student who communicated the threat, the recipient(s) of the threat, and witnesses shall be interviewed to obtain specific information regarding the threat, in accordance with the Threat Assessment Guidelines. The Guidelines can be found at <address>
- D. When a threat is reported to the school administrator, the administrator makes a preliminary determination of the seriousness of the threat. If it can be determined that the threat is a transient threat and has been resolved, the Threat Assessment Documentation may be completed at the administrator's discretion. If the threat has not been resolved, the Threat Assessment Documentation and Threat Assessment and Response Summary Sheet forms shall be completed.
- E. In every instance in which a threat against a student is not immediately resolved, the school administrator shall notify the parent/guardian of the student who made the threat. The school administrator shall also notify any identifiable victims or targets of the threat. If the target is a student or students, the parent/guardians shall also be notified. If the threat is not specific about the identity of the victim(s), the school administrator shall make a determination based on the circumstances of the threat whether it is appropriate to communicate to a more general notification to potential victims, such as in the form of a letter to parent/guardians. In most cases, such a letter would be appropriate to address questions and concerns that might be disruptive to learning and to solicit information that would be relevant to resolving the threat.
- F. Threat assessment and disciplinary procedures are separate processes. Regardless of whether a threat is determined to be transient, serious substantive, or very serious substantive, appropriate disciplinary procedures shall be followed.
- G. If the threat is determined to be serious substantive or very serious substantive, the Threat Assessment Documentation and Threat Assessment and Response Summary Sheet forms and other relevant documents regarding the threat shall be maintained in the cumulative file of the student's scholastic record. If the threat is determined to be transient and the forms were completed, they may be maintained in the student's scholastic record at the administrator's discretion.

Adapted from Fairfax County Public Schools

# THREAT ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE PROTOCOL

Adapted from the *Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence (Cornell & Sheras, 2006)*

## IDENTIFY AND EVALUATE THREAT

A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, written, gestured, or communicated in some other form, such as via text messaging, email, or other electronic means. An expression of intent to harm someone is considered a threat regardless of whether it is communicated to the intended victim(s) and regardless of whether the intended victim is aware of the threat. This protocol does NOT address threats to damage property, threats made by non-students, fights with no threat, or verbiage such as slurs, insults, or verbal abuse that does not constitute a threat. Threats may be implied or stated in an indirect manner if a recipient would reasonably regard the behavior as a threat. **WHEN IN DOUBT, treat the expression as a threat and conduct a threat assessment.**

Student threats shall be reported to the school administrator (principal, assistant principal, or principal designee) if they cannot be easily and readily resolved by other staff. Criteria for reporting threats should include age of the child, and the context of the threat or remark.

The administrator makes a preliminary determination of the seriousness of the threat. The student, recipients of threat, and other witnesses shall be interviewed to obtain a specific account of threat in context using the *Threat Assessment Documentation* form. If the threat has not been resolved, and the administrator determines it is potentially serious, then the *Threat Assessment Documentation and Threat Assessment and Response Summary Sheet* should be completed.

### Student Interview

- Do you know why I wanted to talk with you?
- What happened when you were [place of incident]?
- What exactly did you say? And what exactly did you do?
- What did you mean when you said or did that?
- How do you think he/she feels about what you said or did?
- What was the reason you said or did that?
- What are you going to do now that you have made this threat?

### Witness Interview

- What exactly happened when you were [place of incident]?
- What exactly did [student] say or do?
- What do you think he/she meant when saying that?
- How do you feel about what he/she said or did?
- Why did he/she say or do that?

## DETERMINE WHETHER THREAT IS CLEARLY TRANSIENT OR SUBSTANTIVE

### Transient Threat

Meets one or more of the following:

- Non-genuine expression or intended as joke or figure or speech
- Non-sustainable intent to harm or temporary anger that is resolved
- Resolved on scene or office (time-limited)
- Conflict is resolved and ends with apology, retraction, or clarification

WHEN IN DOUBT, consider threat as substantive and assess further

### Substantive Threat

Factors to consider in judging a threat to be substantive:

- Specific, plausible details such as a specific victim, time, place, and method
- Threat has been repeated over time or related to multiple persons
- Threat is reported as a plan or planning has taken place
- Recruitment of accomplices or invitation for an audience
- Physical evidence of intent to carry out threat (e.g., lists, drawings, written plan)
- Student's age and capability of carrying out the threat
- Student's history of aggressive behavior
- Credibility of student and witness accounts

## DETERMINE IF SUBSTANTIVE THREAT IS SERIOUS OR VERY SERIOUS

### Serious

A threat to assault

### Very Serious

Threat to kill, rape, or inflict severe injury or use weapons

## RESPOND TO TRANSIENT THREAT

- ❖ Contact student's parents if necessary
- ❖ Notify intended victim's parents if necessary to prevent further problems
- ❖ See that threat is resolved through explanation, apology or making amends
- ❖ Consult with safety and security specialist/SRO if appropriate
- ❖ Refer for conflict mediation or counseling, to resolve problem if appropriate
- ❖ Follow discipline procedures
- ❖ Develop Behavior Intervention Plan /behavior contract as appropriate
- ❖ Maintain threat assessment documentation in student's cumulative file, if completed, as appropriate

## RESPOND TO SERIOUS THREAT

- ❖ Mobilize threat assessment team members as needed
- ❖ Notify student's parents
- ❖ Protect and notify intended victim and parents of victim
- ❖ Caution the student about the consequences of carrying out the threat
- ❖ Provide direct supervision of student until parents assume control
- ❖ Consult with SRO or safety/security specialist
- ❖ Refer for conflict resolution or counseling
- ❖ Follow discipline procedures
- ❖ Develop Behavior Intervention Plan/behavior contract
- ❖ Maintain threat assessment documentation in student's cumulative file

## RESPOND TO VERY SERIOUS THREAT

- ❖ Mobilize threat assessment team and follow procedures for Serious threat, including protective action and notification of intended victim and parents of victim
- ❖ Provide direct supervision of student until parents assume control
- ❖ Notify assistant superintendent or designee
- ❖ Consult with SRO or safety /security specialist for investigation of threat
- ❖ Initiate immediate mental health assessment if emergency situation; otherwise notify parents of need for mental health assessment
- ❖ Follow discipline procedures
- ❖ Develop Behavior Intervention Plan/behavior contract
- ❖ Maintain threat assessment documentation in student's cumulative file

## Threat Assessment Documentation

**Instructions:** This form should be completed by the school administrator when conducting a threat assessment. This form should be maintained as part of the student's cumulative file if the threat is determined to be substantive. If the threat is determined to be transient, the form may be maintained in the student's cumulative file at the discretion of the administrator. Record specific account(s) of the threat made from the student making the threat **and** from the recipient(s) of the threat and witness(s) as applicable.

Administrator completing form:

Position:

School:

Date this form completed:

### Information on student making threat

Name of student

Date of birth

Grade

Address

Home phone

Emergency contact

Relationship

Is there a history of violent behavior in school?

Yes  No  Unknown

Is there a history of violent behavior away from school?

Yes  No  Unknown

Is there a history of discipline referrals? Yes  No  Unknown

Other information:

### Information about the threat

Date threat occurred: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_ Date administrator learned of threat: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Where the threat was made:

Who reported the threat:

What was reported (use quotation marks to identify direct quotes)

### Information on target(s) of threat

Has the intended target/victim(s) been identified? Yes  No

Name(s) & grade of victim(s):

Target(s) of the threat (check all that apply):

Student  Teacher  Parent  Administrator  Other

Number of victim/recipients of threat:  one  two  three  four  five or more

## Threat Assessment Student Interview Form

**Directions:** Use these questions as a guide to interview the student making the threat. Other questions can be asked as appropriate. This form should not be completed by the student. Use quotation marks to indicate student's exact words when possible.

Administrator completing form:

Position:

School:

Date this form completed:

Student interviewed:

1. What happened today when you were [place of incident]? (Record student's exact words for key statements if possible.)

2. What exactly did you say? And what exactly did you do?

3. What did you mean when you said or did that?

4. How do you think [person who was threatened] feels about what you said or did? (Probe to see if the student believes it frightened or intimidated the person.)

5. What was the reason you said or did that? (Probe to find out if there is a prior conflict or history to this threat.)

6. What are you going to do now? (Ask questions to determine if the student intends to carry out the threat.)

7. Additional witnesses or other relevant information.

## Threat Assessment Witness Interview Form

**Directions:** Use these questions as a guide to interview witnesses who have direct or indirect knowledge of the threat. Complete separate forms for each witness. Other questions can be asked as appropriate. This form should not be completed by the witness. Use quotation marks to indicate witness's exact words when possible.

Administrator completing form:

Position:

School:

Date this form completed:

Witness interviewed:

1. What exactly did [student who made the threat] say or do? (Record witness's exact words for key statements if possible.)

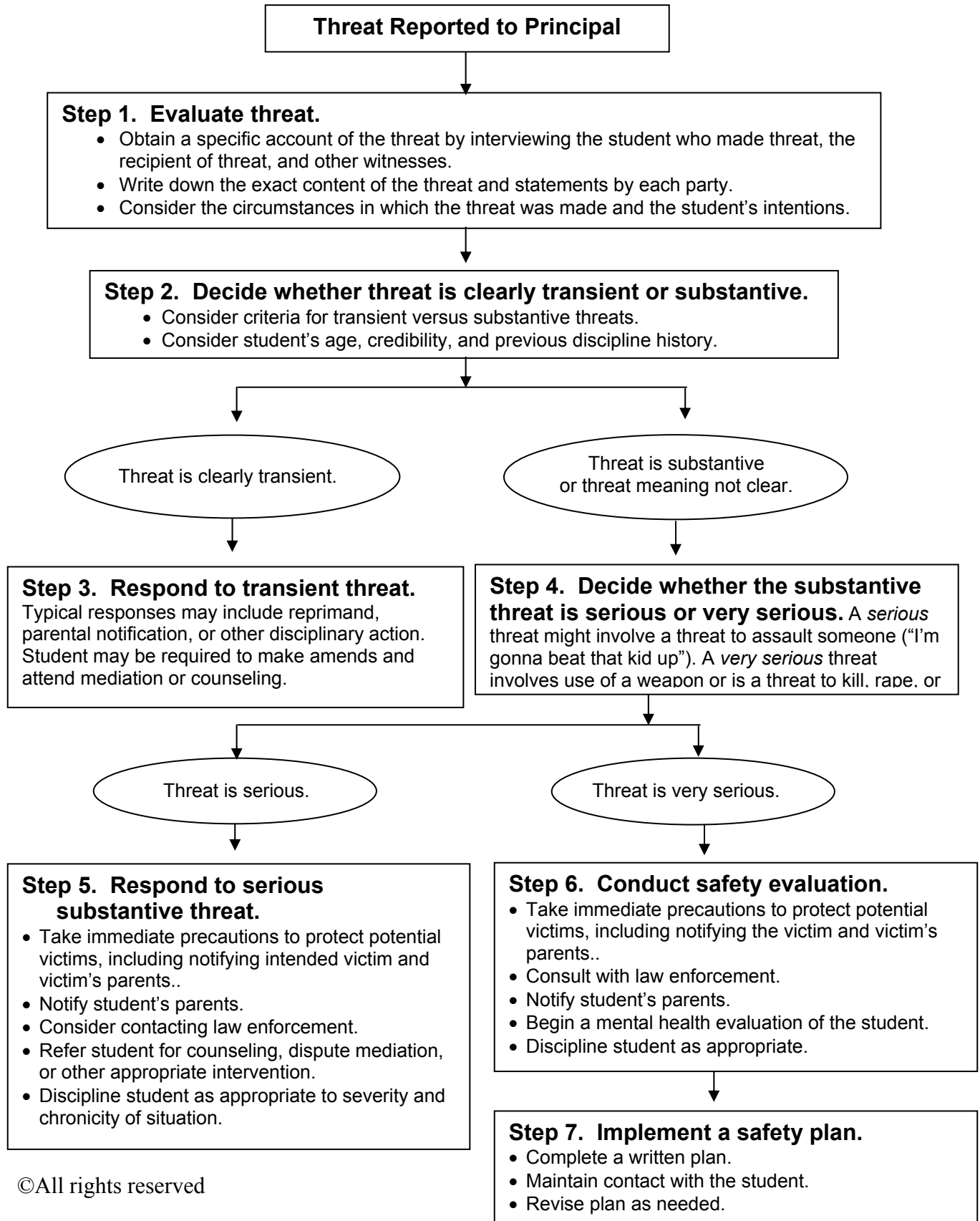
2. What do you think he or she meant when saying or doing that?

3. How do you feel about what he or she said or did? (Gauge whether the witness feels frightened or intimidated.) Are you concerned that he or she might actually do it?

4. Why did he or she say or do that? (Find out whether the witness knows of any prior conflict or history behind the threat.)

5. Additional witnesses or other relevant information.

Figure 1. Decision tree for student threat assessment.



## Threat Assessment Training Case Exercise Worksheet

(Use one of these worksheets for each case)

### Step 1. Evaluate Threat.

What witnesses would you call to assess the severity of the threat?

What was the content of the threat and what were the circumstances in which it was made?

What was the student's explanation of the meaning of the threat?

What were the witness(es) and/or threat recipient's perception of the meaning of the threat?

### Step 2. Decide if the threat is clearly transient or substantive.

Is the threat transient?       Yes    No

If the threat is transient, please list the reasons why below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

*(If the threat is transient, continue on to Step 3. If the threat is substantive, respond to the question below.)*

Is the threat substantive?       Yes    No

If the threat is substantive, please list the reasons why below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

*(Continue on to Step 4.)*

### Step 3. Respond to Transient Threat.

If the threat is transient, what response steps would be appropriate in this situation?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*(If the threat is transient, Step 3 is the last step in this exercise.  
If the threat is substantive, please continue to Step 4.)*

#### **Step 4. Decide if the substantive threat is *serious* or *very serious*.**

If the threat is substantive, would it be considered *serious* or *very serious*?

Serious substantive threat    Very serious substantive threat (Please list reasons below.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

*(If the threat is a serious threat, proceed to Step 5.  
If the threat is very serious, skip to Step 6.)*

#### **Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.**

What appropriate steps would you take to respond to this serious substantive threat?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*(If the threat is a serious threat, Step 5 is the last step in this exercise.)*

#### **Step 6. Conduct Safety Evaluation.**

What appropriate steps would you take to conduct a Safety Evaluation in the case of a very serious threat?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

#### **Step 7. Follow up with action plan.**

What would be appropriate follow-up procedures?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

## Threat Assessment Case Exercise 1

### Sixth Grade Rivalry

#### Scenario

Sixth grade boys, Chris and Billy, had been rivals since first grade. Recently their conflicts had become more frequent and more intense. Towards the end of class, Chris overheard Billy talking to a group of girls and referring to him as a “sissy boy.” Chris had had enough. He waited for Billy outside class and then went straight up to him and said, “You’ve had it man. I’m gonna kick your \_\_\_\_\_. Meet me out back after school.” Their teacher, Ms. Johnson, overheard the confrontation in the hall and approached the boys. The boys said it was “nothing” but Ms. Johnson was concerned about Chris’s threatening statement and reported the incident to the principal.

The principal, Mr. Stevens, called the boys into his office immediately and met with them one at a time.

#### *Interview with Chris:*

Chris entered the room obviously agitated. As the principal asked him about the incident, Chris glared at the floor and answered the principal’s questions abruptly and insincerely. *No*, he was not arguing with Billy and *yes*, everything was fine between the two of them. He said he didn’t remember exactly what he said to Chris and that “Ms. Johnson was overreacting.” As Mr. Stevens asked more questions, Chris responded that he was just “sick of Billy’s cocky attitude” and “wished Billy would lay off [him],” but stated again that the incident was “no big deal.” Mr. Stevens asked Chris to wait outside his office while he spoke with Billy.

#### *Interview with Billy:*

Billy told quite a different story than Chris. Billy stated that Chris “got in [his] face and threatened to beat [him] up after school.” He said that he didn’t know what Chris’s problem was and that he had been acting “weird... kind of punchy” lately. Billy stated that Chris just “needed to get over himself and leave [him] alone.”

#### *Interview with the teacher:*

Ms. Johnson said she heard Chris tell Billy to meet him after school and could testify to the ongoing conflict between the boys. She said that they deliberately sat on opposite sides of the classroom and were often seen trading insults across the room and recruiting others to join in the harassment. Ms. Johnson thought a fight between the boys was inevitable.

#### *Discipline histories:*

Both Chris and Billy have a record of multiple detentions for disorderly conduct, tardies, and truancy.

## Threat Assessment Case Exercise 2

### *Harassment between Friends*

#### Scenario

The bell has rung at a local middle school and students are moving throughout the halls changing classes. A student comments to a passing student of Arab descent, “Man, I hate you guys, go back where you came from because we don’t want you here in America. I am going to bomb you back to where you came from.” The Arab student says nothing, but hurries to class where he reports the event to the teacher who informs the principal.

The principal, Ms. Thompson, called the following individuals into her office and interviewed them about the incident.

#### *Interview with Sam (threatened student):*

“I was walking down the hall to class when Theo said that I am not wanted in America and that he was going to bomb me back to where I came from. Theo used to be my friend. I felt like saying, ‘I am from America, and proud,’ but I just ran away and told the teacher. I don’t know what to do. I am not afraid of Theo, but I just don’t feel welcome at this school anymore. I am so tired of all of this hate. I am a US citizen and don’t deserve to be treated like this.”

#### *Interview with Theo (student who made the threat):*

“Man, I am going to get in trouble for this. I am sorry, I didn’t mean it. I am not going to hurt anybody. I walked by Sam in the hall and just started thinking about everything going on in Afghanistan and got mad and told him to go back to where he came from. I didn’t mean it; he is my friend. I have just been so confused about this whole situation that I want all of the Arabs to just leave America alone.

*Theo’s Discipline History:* Theo has had detention two times this school year for being tardy. He has also received a discipline referral for excessive talking.

#### *Interview with their teacher:*

“Sam came to me on the verge of tears. He said that a friend, Theo, ‘just told him that he wasn’t wanted in America and he was going to bomb him back to where he came from.’ I was shocked. Theo and Sam have always been good friends. Sam has been so worried lately and he is not focusing well in class at all. I am really surprised at Theo. He gets in trouble for talking and sometimes he has a bad temper, but I have never heard Theo say something so hateful.”

#### *Interview with Witness 1:*

“Everybody was changing classes and some of us were talking about the terrorist attacks. Theo got mad and all of a sudden and told Sam that ‘he was going to bomb him back to where he came from.’ Then Theo just ran down the hall. Theo and Sam have always been friends. I don’t think Theo meant it; he just got really angry and went off at the mouth. Theo has done it before, but he didn’t mean it.

## **Threat Assessment Case Exercise 3**

### *Johnny Threatens his Classmates*

#### **Scenario**

Before class, a ninth grade boy reports to his teacher that a friend and fellow classmate of his, Johnny, told him that Friday was the day “some kids were going to die”. This boy told the teacher that Johnny has always been talking about a group of popular kids whom he’d like to “get rid of,” and recounted different incidents in which those kids teased or mocked Johnny on the bus and in the locker room at school. The friend told the teacher that Johnny has always been angry with this group of kids, but lately he’s been really fed up. The friend showed the teacher a list of the students Johnny had made in his notebook that had a heavy line drawn through it, and next Friday’s date written across the top. The teacher showed the principal the list and relayed the concerns of Johnny’s friend, and the principal began evaluating the threat.

The principal called the following people into his office to assess the situation:

#### *Interview with Johnny’s Teacher:*

“Johnny has never been a discipline problem in my classroom. I’ve noticed that he often sits alone and appears to be on the outside of the popular students in class. I also noticed that two students in my class were on Johnny’s list of students with a line through it. Last semester I saw these two students teasing Johnny before class. I broke it up and spoke to the two boys afterwards and I haven’t noticed anything since.”

#### *Interview with Johnny:*

“Why did I get called down here, I didn’t do anything wrong. Why are you looking at my notebook? You’re not allowed to search my things, that’s against the law. Yeah I made that list but it don’t mean nothing. I don’t know why I drew a line through those names. I just don’t like those kids, that’s all. No, they don’t tease me. I just don’t like them. Why do you have to call my parents? I didn’t do anything.”

*Observations of Johnny:* Johnny appeared anxious from the start. He was very worried when the notebook was opened. When the issue of teasing was brought up he became quiet and denied any violent intentions.

*Johnny’s Discipline History:* Johnny has two fights on his record from the previous year. Upon further investigation it was noted that each fight was with another boy whose name appeared on the list in Johnny’s notebook. There was a meeting held after last semester regarding Johnny’s declining grades attended by Johnny’s math teacher, guidance counselor, assistant principal, and both of his parents. They appeared concerned about Johnny’s grades and reports of him being teased by other students. The school staff were unaware that bullying was going on and agreed to increase monitoring of these students.

*Interview with Witness 1:*

“I told my teacher about the things Johnny has been saying because I think he’s been acting funny lately. At first I thought he was just kidding, but he’s talked about it a bunch of times. Yeah, he’s been getting picked on for awhile. Mainly on the bus and in the locker room. Johnny tried to fight back a couple of times, except now I think he tries to ignore them, but it doesn’t really work. He’s afraid to tell on them because he thinks they might gang up on him sometime when no teachers are around. I just don’t want something really bad to happen at our school.”

*Interview with Johnny’s Mother:*

“I cannot believe my son would do something like this. Believe me he will be grounded when he gets home. I do not think it is necessary for him to talk to a psychologist, and he definitely does not need to be suspended. After all, it’s really the school’s fault. At that meeting last semester he told you that he was being bullied and you didn’t do anything about it because obviously, he’s still being bullied. I don’t blame him for being angry and saying those things. He was just talking out of frustration. We all know that he would never hurt anyone.”

*Interview with Victim’s Father:*

“I am surprised that my son was involved in any bullying and he should be disciplined for that. But the real concern is with Johnny. That boy made some serious threats against my kid and you better not tolerate that behavior in this school. I would expect that he will be expelled so my son doesn’t have to spend the rest of his school career looking over his shoulder.”