



Violence Prevention in Schools

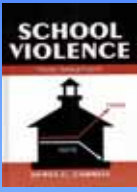
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Dr. Cornell has studied youth violence for over 20 years and has assisted numerous schools in the development of violence prevention programs. He has authored more than 100 publications in psychology and education, including two recent books: *Guidelines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



Hard or Soft?

Should schools be strict or be supportive?

The Virginia High School Safety Study investigated school discipline practices associated with lower rates of bullying and misbehavior.

Virginia High School Safety Study

296 of 314 (94%) Virginia high schools

- 7,431 ninth grade students
- 2,353 ninth grade teachers

Online school climate survey

Virginia High School Safety Study

Two dimensions of school climate

- 1. Structure**
 - Rules are strictly enforced, but fair
- 2. Support**
 - Students feel respected, willing to seek help from teachers.

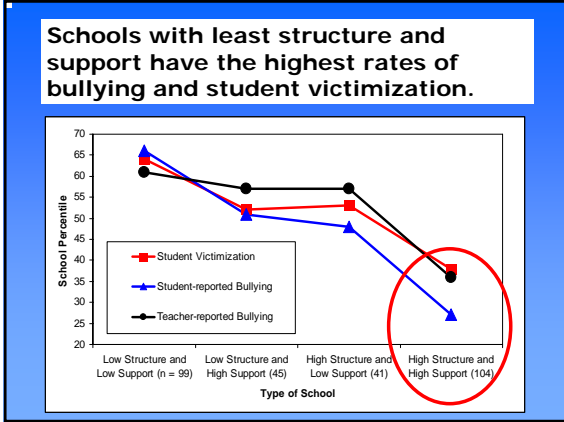
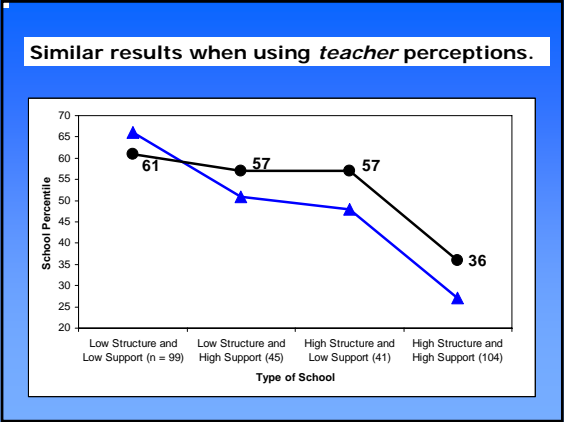
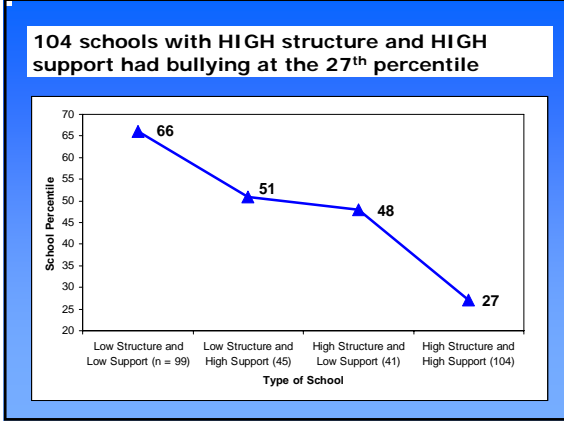
4 Groups of Schools

		Structure	
		Hi	Lo
Support	Hi	104	45
	Lo	41	99

Virginia High School Safety Study

Outcome Measures

1. Student reports of bullying
2. Student reports of being a victim (theft, assault, etc.)
3. Teacher perceptions of bullying




Study Conclusion

Schools do not have to choose between “get tough” and “be supportive” policies, but should strive for both. However, rules must be enforced in a fair and consistent manner that respects and supports students.



For every problem there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong. H. L. Mencken

FBI Recommendations on School Violence



“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

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.

Continuum of Threats



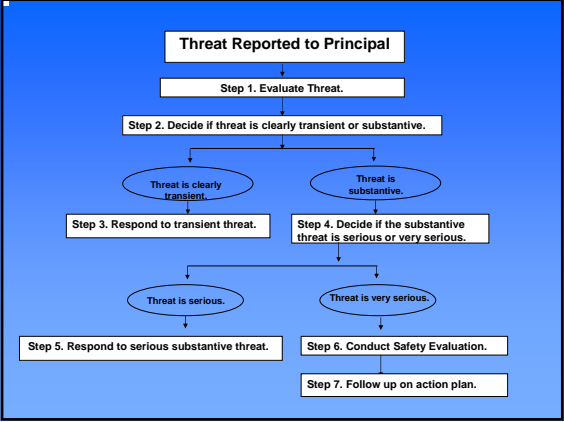
- Warning of impending violence
- Attempts to intimidate or frighten
- Thrill of causing a disruption
- Attention-seeking, boasting
- Fleeting expressions of anger
- Jokes
- Figures of speech

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.

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.
Not required to serve on team Teachers, aides, other staff	Report threats, provide input to team. No additional workload.



- Step-by-step guidelines and decision-tree
- Many case examples
- Case exercises for team training
- Research-based and field-tested
- Grades K-12

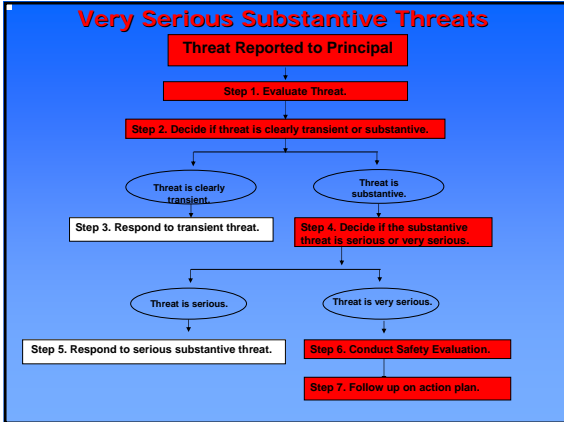
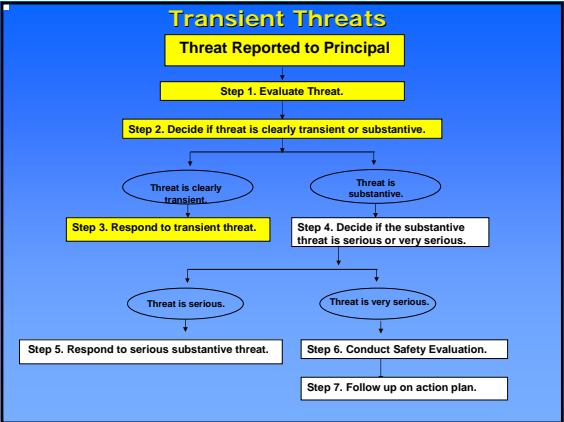
Available from sopriswest.com

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.



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.
- Mental Health Assessment.
- Determine safety during suspension.



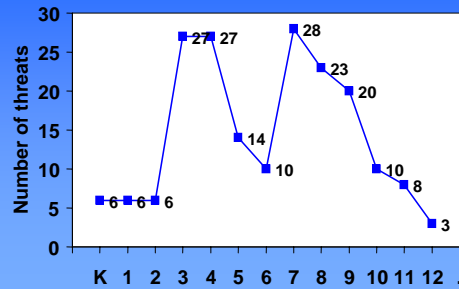
Mental Health Assessment

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

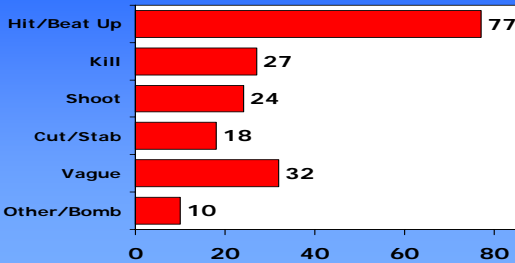
Step 7. Follow up with action plan.

- 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.

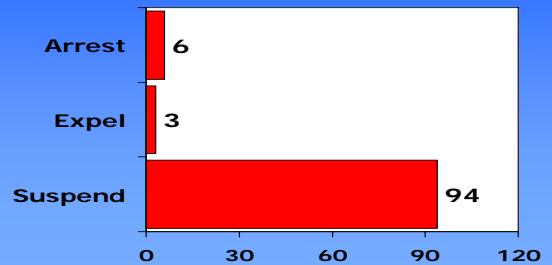
Grade Levels for 188 Student Threats of Violence



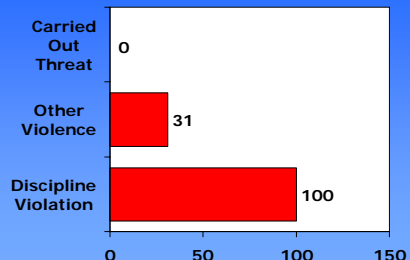
What did the students threaten to do?



How did schools respond to 188 threats?



Follow-up on student behavior after the threat



According to school principals interviewed after approximately one year.



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

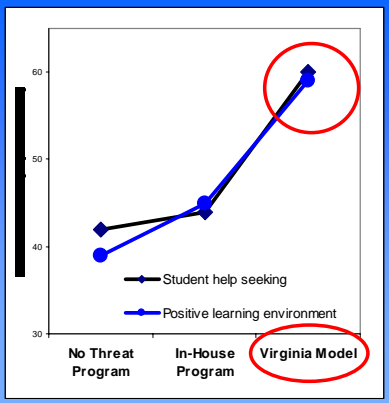
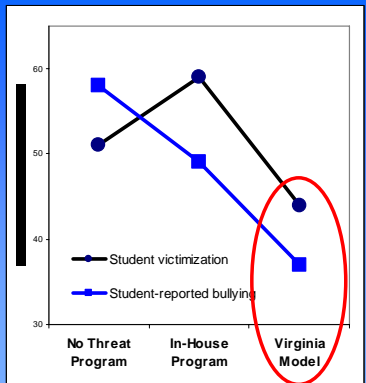
Behavioral Disorders, 2008



Virginia High School Threat Assessment Study

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

School Psychology Quarterly, 2009



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

School Psychology Quarterly, 2009

