

Assessment of Threat

(8 page section)

Introduction

These materials offer a starting point when addressing possible school-violence, but are not intended to be a script or to be implemented in rote fashion. At all times it is expected that school personnel will use professional judgment in assessing and addressing potential threats to safety. It is essential to use “warning signs” and other materials responsibly. The processes described herein offer an opportunity to help maintain school safety by identifying and referring individuals who need help. They **are not** intended to encourage school-wide student profiling, labeling or stigmatizing of individuals.

In the event of an IMMEDIATE danger:

- Call Law Enforcement or 911
- Take immediate action to secure or isolate the individual posing a threat, and prevent access to potential weapons (if known)
- Take immediate action to move others from harm’s way (in immediate vicinity of event)
- Initiate Lockdown procedures (determine who initiates the lockdown, keep this consistent across the school district)

If “Warning Signs” are observed, but there is not an imminent risk:

- Have individual or team observing “Warning Signs” complete a Threat Assessment Referral Form (if not completed already)
- Activate appropriate members of (School Based) Emergency Response Team
- Interview the individual of concern (consider using a trained counselor)
- Notify 911, if necessary
- Notify Superintendent, District Support Team and District Pupil Personnel
- Contact parents or legal guardian and obtain a release of information to exchange information between agencies
- Review Warning Signs, Risk Factors, Precipitating Events, Stabilizing Factors by completing Threat Assessment Worksheet
- Make recommendations to parents to seek appropriate mental health services
- Determine level of risk using Risk for Harm Categories (page 107)
- Develop an action plan according to the determined level of risk
- Document referrals, actions taken, follow-up plans, etc.
- Develop a plan to monitor student’s response to actions taken, a “return to school plan” and to review new information as it becomes available

Additional steps for our school/facility (if any):

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Emergency Operations

Threat Assessment Referral Form

If you become concerned that an individual may pose a risk for harming himself or others complete this form by stating your concern, checking the Warning Signs of which you are aware, and explaining items checked. Turn it in directly to the school's principal or designee. In an *Imminent* safety threat, notify principal immediately and take immediate action to secure or isolate the individual, and move other students from harm's way.

Individual under concern _____ Date of birth _____

Person(s) completing this form _____ Room/phone _____

School _____ Date of referral _____

I. Reason for referral (explain your concerns) _____

II. Imminent Warning Signs (when an individual displays Imminent Warning Signs; take immediate action to maintain safety, mobilize law enforcement and appropriate school personnel)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Possession and/or use of firearm or other weapon
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Suicide threats or statements
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Detailed threats of lethal violence (time, place, method, hit list) | <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Severe rage for seemingly minor reasons
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Severe destruction of property
<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Serious physical fighting with peers, family, others |
|--|---|

III. Early Warning Signs (mark items, then elaborate below)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Social withdrawal or lacking interpersonal skills
<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone
<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Excessive feelings of rejection
<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Being a victim of violence, teasing, bullying
<input type="checkbox"/> 11. Feelings of being picked on
<input type="checkbox"/> 12. Low school interest, poor academic performance
<input type="checkbox"/> 13. Expressions of violence in writings and drawings
<input type="checkbox"/> 14. Uncontrolled anger
<input type="checkbox"/> 15. Patterns of impulsive and chronic, hitting and bullying
<input type="checkbox"/> 16. History of discipline problems
<input type="checkbox"/> 17. History of violent, aggressive and antisocial behavior across settings (i.e., fighting, fire setting, cruelty to animals, vandalism, etc., especially begun before age 12) | <input type="checkbox"/> 18. Intolerance for differences, prejudicial attitudes
<input type="checkbox"/> 19. Drug and alcohol use
<input type="checkbox"/> 20. Affiliation with gangs
<input type="checkbox"/> 21. Inappropriate access, possession, use of firearms
<input type="checkbox"/> 22. Threats of violence (direct or indirect)
<input type="checkbox"/> 23. Talking about weapons or bombs
<input type="checkbox"/> 24. Ruminating over perceived injustices
<input type="checkbox"/> 25. Seeing self as victim of a particular individual
<input type="checkbox"/> 26. General statements of distorted, bizarre thoughts
<input type="checkbox"/> 27. Feelings of being persecuted
<input type="checkbox"/> 28. Obsession with particular person
<input type="checkbox"/> 29. Depression
<input type="checkbox"/> 30. Marked change in appearance
<input type="checkbox"/> 31. Other _____ |
|--|--|

IV. Explain checked items; describe known Precipitating Events (use back if needed)

V. Turn in this form and any materials you may have which may be necessary to conduct a preliminary risk assessment (i.e., writings, notes, printed e-mail or internet materials, books, drawings, confiscated items, etc.). This information should be routed to the principal or his/her designee.

FOR OFFICE AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM USE:

Date Received: _____ School Case Manager assigned to follow referral: _____

Threat Assessment Worksheet (2 pages)

(To be completed by the School Based Case Worker and staff members who have daily contact with the student of concern)

Coupled with the Referral Form (which addresses Warning Signs), this outline addresses Risk Factors, Precipitating Events, and Stabilizing Factors. The worksheet is designed to provide a concise way to organize known concerns when conducting a preliminary risk assessment and to list relevant school and agency involvement.

Individual under concern _____ Date of birth _____

Person(s) completing this form _____

Parent/legal guardian name _____ Phone _____

School _____ Date of referral _____

I. School and Agency Involvement (past or present) *To determine if safety concerns have been noted by others. List name, contact information and date of involvement if known:*

School Law Enforcement or Discipline Referrals _____

Special Education, 504, or Under Consideration _____

School-Based Mental Health or Social Services _____

Family Resource and Youth Services Center _____

Community Social Services _____

Police, Juvenile Court, Probation Services _____

Community Mental Health Services _____

Current or prior institutionalization or foster care placement _____

Other _____

Comments/concerns expressed by any of the above _____

II. Risk Factors *(indicate if Observed, Documented, or Suspected; circle O, D, S, respectively)*

In possession or has access to weapons (O, D, S) _____

History of impulsive violent or other antisocial behavior (O, D, S) _____

Child abuse/neglect (O, D, S) _____

Isolation or social withdrawal (O, D, S) _____

Domestic violence or other family conflict (O, D, S) _____

Depression, mental illness, medical ailment (O, D, S) (list current medications) _____

Substance abuse or drug trafficking (O, D, S) _____

Fire setting (O, D, S) _____

Emergency Operations

Threat Assessment Worksheet — (Page 2)

II. Risk Factors *(continued) (indicate Observed, Documented, or Suspected, O, D, S, respectively)*

Bed wetting (O, D, S) _____

Cruelty to animals (O, D, S) _____

Preoccupation with real or fictional violence (O, D, S) _____

Repeated exposure to violence (desensitization) (O, D, S) _____

Gang involvement or affiliation (O, D, S) _____

Other _____

III. Precipitating Events *(recent triggers which may influence violence)*

Recent public humiliation/embarrassment (whether instigated by adult or peer) _____

Boyfriend/girlfriend relationship difficulties _____

Death, loss or other traumatic event _____

Highly publicized violent act (such as a school shooting) _____

Family fight or conflict _____

Recent victim of teasing, bullying or abuse _____

Other _____

IV. Stabilizing Factors *(factors which may minimize or mitigate likelihood or level of violence)*

Effective parental involvement _____

Involved with mental health; list provider or agency (if known) _____

Social support networks (church, school, social organizations) _____

Close alliance with a supportive adult (counselor, mentor, teacher, minister, etc.) _____

Positive, constructive peer group _____

Appropriate outlets for anger or other strong feelings _____

Positive focus on the future or appropriate future events _____

Other _____

V. Category of Risk *(Determine a Risk for Harm (RFH) Category based on available information)*

Imminent - High - Moderate - Minor - Low/No (date and time of determination _____)

NOTE: RFH Categories represent a distinct moment in time and may change from hour to hour, and day to day. Following an initial assessment, it is essential to monitor on-going status, to reassess level of risk according to new information, and to document significant changes.

Risk (or Threat) Assessment Concepts

- I. **Warning Signs:** A sign or indicator that causes concern for safety.
 - A. **Imminent Warning Sign:** A sign which indicates that an individual is very close to behaving in a way that is potentially dangerous to self or others. Imminent Warning Signs call for *immediate* action by school authorities and law enforcement.
 - B. **Early Warning Signs:** Certain behavioral and emotional signs that, when viewed in a context, may signal a troubled individual. Early Warning Signs call for a referral to a school's Threat Assessment Team for assessment.
- II. **Risk Factors:** Historical or background conditions which may influence the potential for violence. These factors may include family history of violence, prior antisocial behavior, mental health background, and various social factors.
- III. **Precipitating Events:** Recent events or “triggers” which may increase potential for violence. These factors may include recent family conflict, rejection from a significant peer, serious conflict with a teacher, etc.
- IV. **Stabilizing Factors:** Support systems or networks in place for an individual which may *decrease* the likelihood for violence. These factors may include effective parental relationships, positive peer groups, strong relationship with a teacher, counselor or therapist, etc.
- V. **Threat Assessment:** The process of reviewing Warning Signs, Risk Factors, Precipitating Events, and Stabilizing Factors when referring a student of concern to a mental health professional for further assessment. This information is forwarded to the mental health professional in an effort to assist in identifying the threat.

Risk For Harm Categories

Risk For Harm Categories provide a way for schools to determine and assign a level of risk based on a review of Warning Signs, Risk Factors, Precipitating Events, and Stabilizing Factors. **Based on level of risk**, the Emergency Response Team develops action plans to maintain safety and to help an individual gain access to needed services or interventions. The descriptors following each Category **are not an exhaustive list**, but are provided as a frame of reference.

Category 1: Imminent Risk for Harm

An individual is, or is very close to, behaving in a way that is potentially dangerous to self or others.

Examples include:

- Detailed threats of lethal violence
- Suicide threats
- Possession and/or use of firearms or other weapons
- Hit list
- Serious physical fighting, etc.

Most individuals identified under this category will qualify for immediate hospitalization or arrest.

Responses may include:

- Immediate action to secure individual
- Facility lock down
- Security response
- Immediate referral to professional mental health provider
- Parent notification
- Background or records check
- “Return to school plans,” and/or ongoing case management

Category 2: High Risk for Harm

An individual has displayed significant Early Warning Signs, has significant existing Risk Factors and/or Precipitating Events, and has few Stabilizing Factors. May not qualify for hospitalization or arrest at present, but requires referrals for needed services and active case management.

Responses may include:

- Immediate action to secure individual
- Security response
- Parent notification
- Psychological consult/evaluation
- Background check

Category 3: Moderate Risk for Harm

An individual has displayed some Early Warning Signs and may have existing Risk Factors or recent Precipitating Events, but also may have some Stabilizing Factors. There may be evidence of internal emotional distress (depression, social withdrawal, etc.) or of intentional infliction of distress on others (bullying, intimidation, seeking to cause fear, etc.).

Responses may include:

- Security response
- Parent notification
- Psychological consult/evaluation
- Background or records check
- Ongoing case management

Category 4: Minor Risk for Harm

An individual has displayed minor Early Warning Signs, but assessment reveals little history of serious Risk Factors or dangerous behavior. Stabilizing Factors appear to be reasonably well established. There may be evidence of the unintentional infliction of distress on others (insensitive remarks, “teasing” taken too far, etc.).

Responses may include:

- Review of school records
- Parent notification
- Psychological consult
- Security response

Category 5: Low / No Risk for Harm

Upon assessment it appears there is insufficient evidence for any risk for harm. Situations under this category can include misunderstandings, poor decision making, false accusations from peers (seeking to get other peers in trouble), etc.

Responses may include:

- Investigation of the situation
- Notification and involvement of others as needed

Brief Interview Outline for Individual Under Concern

When interviewing an individual about safety concerns, one method is to ask questions which move from general introduction, to fact finding, to recognition of concerns, to assessing support networks, to developing an outline for next steps. **The following questions are not** intended to be a scripted interview, but provide a sample structure for the kinds of questions which may need to be asked. Individuals using this outline are encouraged to use their professional judgment and experience to expand these questions as needed. Note, in general it is good to avoid “yes or no” questions.

1. “Seems like you’ve been having a hard time lately, what’s going on?” *(to establish rapport and trust and to open dialog in a non-threatening way)*
2. “What is your understanding of why you have been asked to come to the office?” *(to review factual events)*
3. “What is your understanding of why school staff are concerned?” *(to determine if student is aware of effect behavior has on others)*
4. “What has been going on recently with you at school?” *(to look into possible precipitating events such as peer conflict, student/teacher interactions, failing grades, etc.; follow appropriate leads)*
5. “How are things going with your family?” *(to look into events such as recent moves, divorce, deaths or losses, conflict)*
6. “What else is going on with you?” *(to look into events outside of school such as community unrest, threats, police involvement, medical issues, etc.)*
7. “Who do you have to talk to or assist you with this situation?” *(to determine what supports or stabilizing factors may be available or in place such as mental health professionals, peer groups, family supports, church groups, etc.)*
8. “Given (whatever is going on), what are you planning to do?” or, “What are you thinking about doing?” *(follow-up on appropriate leads, including the level of detail in stated plans, ability to carry out plans, etc.)* **(NOTE: If there is an IMMINENT RISK take immediate action to maintain safety by contacting school security and/or 911).**
9. Close with a statement that describes short term next steps (i.e., “I’ll need to contact your parents to talk about...”, I will also need to speak with the principal and the assistant principals for possible further action(s) and we will need to devise a plan for next steps). Try to determine student’s mood prior to his/her departure, and alert others if necessary.