

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING PARENT MATERIALS RELATED TO STUDENT SAFETY CONCERNS

Compliance with 22.1-272.1 and 22.1-79.4



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction..... 2

Terminology 3

Dissemination Protocols 4

Communication Process..... 5

Timing and Selection of Materials 5

Accessibility and Delivery Options..... 6

Material Selection Criteria 6

1. Credible Content..... 6

2. Accessible and Welcoming 6

3. Clear and User Friendly..... 7

4. Actionable Guidance 7

6. Vetted and Approved by Experts..... 7

7. Consistent with School and Community Policies..... 7

8. Repository of Materials..... 7

Closing..... 8

Appendix..... 9

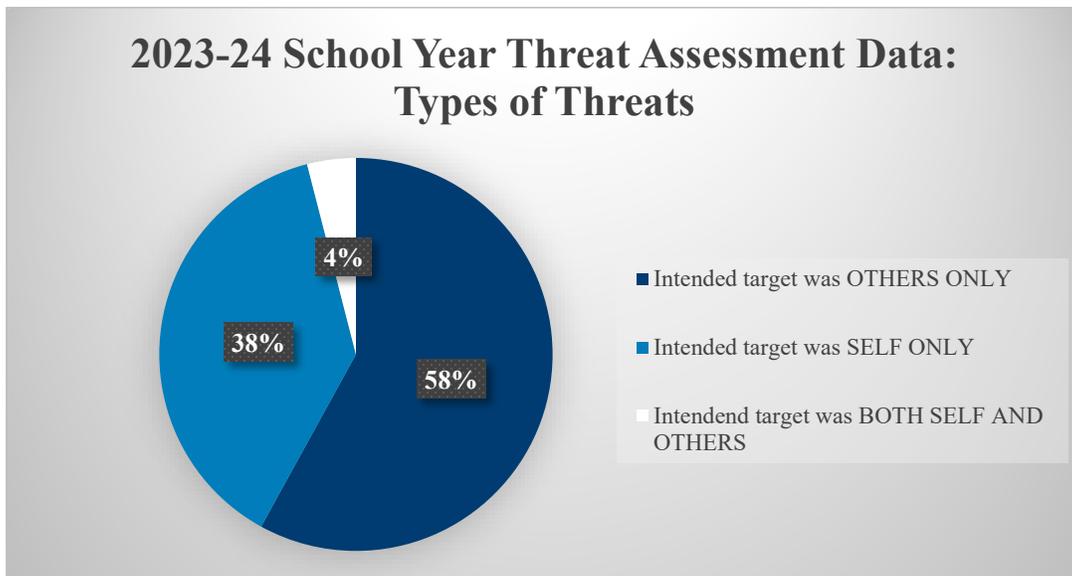
Sample Materials for Parents & Caregivers 9

Materials for Threat Assessment Teams 10

School Safety Materials Selection Checklist..... 12

INTRODUCTION

The mental health and safety of Virginia’s youth remain a critical concern for schools and communities across the state. According to the Virginia Department of Health’s [2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results Report](#), 16.5% of middle and high school students who participated in the survey reported seriously considering suicide. Additionally, 7% of middle school students and 7.7% of high school students reported attempting suicide. Virginia public schools have also seen a corresponding increase in the number of threat assessments conducted. Threat assessment is required in all public K-12 schools, with dedicated teams responsible for identifying, evaluating, and intervening when a student’s behavior may pose a risk to themselves or others. The Department of Criminal Justice Services’ [2024 Virginia School Safety Survey](#) found that schools conducted over 28,000 threat assessments during the 2023-2024 school year. Of these, 24,070 (99% of all assessments conducted) involved concerns about current students. The graph below provides a breakdown of the different types of threats reported.



The 2025 General Assembly enacted two bills that advance the Virginia Department of Education’s efforts to keep students safe by ensuring that parents and caregivers receive timely, accurate information whenever there is a concern regarding their child’s safety relating to potential violence towards self or others. [House Bill 2055](#), patroned by Delegate Atoosa Reaser, was enacted as Chapter 525 on March 24, 2025, amending § [22.1272.1](#) and reinforcing VDOE protocols for when school personnel reasonably believe a student is at imminent risk of suicide. In addition to contacting a parent, schools must provide state approved suicide prevention materials that include guidance on safe firearm storage and limiting access to lethal means. The bill further requires the Board of Education, in collaboration with health agencies, to establish criteria for selection of materials, thus strengthening both prevention efforts and parental support strategies aligned with VDOE’s commitment to student wellbeing and safety.

[House Bill 2679](#), also patroned by Delegate Reaser, updates § [22.179.4](#) by enhancing K-12 threat assessment procedures by requiring superintendents (or their designees) to provide parents or guardians with materials that help them recognize and respond to behaviors suggesting a student may pose a risk to self or others. It mandates that this information be shared either immediately upon initial parental notification or as soon as practicable following notification. Additionally, this bill requires that parents be informed of the legal requirements regarding children’s access to firearms under § [18.2-56.2](#).

Both of these bills build directly on VDOE’s current Suicide Prevention Guidelines and the [Department of Criminal Justice Services’ Threat Assessment and Management in Virginia Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines](#), equipping parents and caregivers with approved resources to partner with school staff in a shared goal of ensuring student safety.

The *Guidelines for Selecting Parent Materials Related to Student Safety Concerns* were created by VDOE, in partnership with the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), and the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). Additionally, school division staff responsible for implementing and overseeing threat assessment policies from five different school divisions served as thought partners, contributing their expertise to the development and review of these guidelines and related materials.

TERMINOLOGY

Lethal Means refers to any objects, substances, or methods that can be used to cause death or serious harm. In the context of suicide prevention and threat assessment, “lethal means” most commonly includes firearms, medications, sharp instruments, or other items that could be used in a suicide attempt or to inflict fatal injuries. Reducing access to lethal means is a key strategy in preventing serious violence and harm to self or others.

Ligature refers to any material or object that can be used to tie, bind, or constrict, often in a way that can cause injury or restrict breathing. In the context of health and safety, particularly in suicide prevention, ligatures are items such as ropes, cords, belts, shoestrings, or sheets that individuals might use to attempt self-harm by hanging or strangulation. Identifying and minimizing access to potential ligature points is an important aspect of creating safe environments.

Parents and Caregivers refer to any adult who has legal responsibility for and/or provides primary care to a student. This includes biological, adoptive, and foster parents, legal guardians, as well as other adults such as grandparents or relatives who have been entrusted with the student’s day-to-day care and well-being.

Threat Assessment is a fact-based process that involves appraising observed or reasonably observable behaviors to identify potentially dangerous or violent situations, investigating and assessing those situations, and managing or addressing them. The primary goal of the threat assessment is to determine if an individual is on a pathway to violence and to intervene as necessary to ensure the safety of all persons involved ([Threat Assessment in Virginia, Virginia](#)

[Department of Criminal Justice Services](#)). For the purposes of this document, threat assessment will include both a threat to self and others.

DISSEMINATION PROTOCOLS

Leading national organizations and public health experts recognize lethal means restriction as a key, evidence-based intervention that significantly reduces the risk of suicide, serious harm, and violence towards others (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Means Matter, 2024).

When considering parental notification related to a threat of violence or physical harm to self or others, both § [22.1-272.1](#) and § [22.1-79.4](#) require immediate parent notification. These guidelines aim to address how safety materials shall be utilized to strengthen and support parental notification requirements.

Table One: Crosswalk of Virginia Code relating to Parental Notification

Virginia Code	Preexisting Parental Notification Requirement	Addition of Safety Materials
§ 22.1-272.1	<i>Any person licensed as administrative or instructional personnel by the Board of Education and employed by a local school board who, in the scope of his employment, has reason to believe, as a result of direct communication from a student, that such student is at imminent risk of suicide, shall, as soon as practicable, (i) contact at least one of such student's parents to ask whether such parent is aware of the student's mental state and whether the parent wishes to obtain or has already obtained counseling for such student.*</i>	<i>Provide to the parent materials on suicide prevention that shall include information on the legal requirements set forth in § 18.2-56.2 relating to the safe storage of firearms in the presence of minors and that may include guidance on best practices and strategies for limiting a student's access to lethal means, including firearms and medications...</i> <i>Be provided to the parent of any student expressing suicidal intentions.</i>
§ 22.1-79.4	<i>Upon a preliminary determination that a student poses a threat of violence or physical harm to self or others, a threat assessment team shall immediately report its determination to the division superintendent or his designee. The division superintendent or his designee shall immediately attempt to notify the student's parent or legal guardian.</i>	<i>The division superintendent or his designee shall provide, either in such initial attempt to notify the student's parent or legal guardian or through a separate communication to the student's parent or legal guardian made as soon as practicable thereafter, materials on recognition of and strategies for responding to behavior indicating that a student poses a threat of violence or physical harm to self or others that shall include information on the legal requirements set forth in § 18.2-56.2 relating to the safe storage of firearms in the presence</i>

Virginia Code	Preexisting Parental Notification Requirement	Addition of Safety Materials
		<i>of minors and that may include guidance on best practices and strategies for limiting a student's access to lethal means, including firearms and medications.</i>

**The only exception to the above requirement is if the student has indicated that the reason for being at imminent risk of suicide relates to parental abuse or neglect. In these situations, the school shall, as soon as practicable, notify the local department of social services, as required by § [63.2-1509](#).*

School divisions are required to update their threat assessment policies to mandate the prompt distribution of applicable safety materials to parents or caregivers when a student is expressing suicidal ideation or when a student poses a threat of violence or physical harm to self or others. Local policies should ensure that these materials are provided in conjunction with a conversation about the child’s safety. This approach not only fulfills notification requirements but also empowers families with the resources needed to understand the situation, take appropriate action at home, and support their child’s safety and well-being. These materials are intended to facilitate meaningful discussions and should always complement, not replace, direct communication with families. For additional guidance on having these important conversations, please refer to the document, [Communicating with Parents About Self-Harm, Suicide, or Violence Risks](#).

Communication Process

Designated school personnel, such as school counselors, psychologists, social workers, administrators, or other threat assessment team members should clearly inform families that additional resources will be provided to support them. These resources are designed to help parents:

- Understand the nature of the concern;
- Understand legal requirements relating to the safe storage of firearms in the presence of minors;
- Navigate available mental health and safety supports; and
- Take informed actions to protect and assist their child.

Information should be shared in a nonjudgmental and supportive way, encouraging families to adopt home safety measures that complement school-based interventions. Framing this process as a partnership encourages collaboration between the school and family, working together toward a positive outcome for the student.

Timing and Selection of Materials

Guidance on limiting access to lethal means, such as firearms and medications, should be consistently provided to parents and caregivers as part of parental notifications related to threat assessment and suicide risk assessment. Initial notification to parents or caregivers may include sharing safety information and materials; however, school teams may determine that it is more appropriate to provide these materials through separate communication at a later time. This decision should be made on a case-by-case basis by the threat assessment or suicide risk

assessment team, ensuring that the materials are relevant to the student’s specific situation and individualized safety concerns.

Accessibility and Delivery Options

Parents should be offered multiple options for receiving safety materials, including:

- Their preferred language;
- Email;
- Sealed envelope sent home;
- Pick-up from the school counselor’s office; and/or
- Delivery to the home by school staff.

In cases of dual households or shared custody, ensure that both parents receive communication so that safety measures are in place in each home. School divisions may also consider making safety materials consistently available on their website, which ensures broad access and reduces the burden on threat assessment teams. A sample webpage template for this purpose is available in the Appendix.

MATERIAL SELECTION CRITERIA

When selecting materials to provide to parents and caregivers regarding student safety, including topics such as access to firearms, threatening behaviors, and suicide risk, school divisions should apply the following set of criteria to ensure the information is accurate, useful, sensitive to family needs, and aligns with best practices.

The following criteria can serve as guidelines for school divisions:

1. Credible Content

- Materials are grounded in current research and best practices from credible sources (e.g., DCJS, VDH, VDOE, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Secret Service Threat Assessment Center).
- Information aligns with state and federal guidelines and laws related to youth mental health, suicide prevention, and threat assessment.
- Materials are reviewed annually to ensure that they remain accurate, relevant, and up-to-date on best practices and available resources.

2. Accessible and Welcoming

- Materials are available in multiple languages, print and digital formats, and can be read by a screen reader.
- Content is delivered in a supportive and nonjudgmental tone that is welcoming and free of stigma and stereotypes related to mental health, violence, or firearm ownership. Messaging should emphasize partnership and support rather than blame or fear.

- Language is empathetic, empowering parents and caregivers as key partners in keeping students safe.
- Language and information are supportive and accepting of all family structures.

3. Clear and User Friendly

- Written communication uses clear language (avoids jargon) and is easily understood by parents and caregivers without specialized training.
- Visuals, infographics, and bullet points can help make complex topics more accessible.

4. Actionable Guidance

- Materials should offer specific, practical steps parents and caregivers can take (e.g., how to safely store firearms, recognize warning signs of distress, or seek mental health support).
- Contact information for local or national crisis lines, mental health services, and school-based supports should be included.

5. Vetted and Approved by Experts

- Materials are reviewed and approved by qualified professionals, such as school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, administrators, local community service providers, law enforcement, and other threat assessment team members.
- Materials should be shared with the local superintendent or local school board for review.

6. Consistent with School and Community Policies

- Materials align with the school's threat assessment protocols, safety plans, and mental health protocols.
- Materials accurately reflect and complement, not contradict, other policies or programs in place within the school or community setting.

7. Repository of Materials

At a minimum, divisions should have a repository of materials accessible to threat assessment teams that inform parents and caregivers of the following:

- Safety Action Steps for Parents/Caregivers on Supervision (to include: digital devices and social media platforms);
- Curated List of Local Mental Health Supports;
- Recognizing and Responding to Signs of Self-Harm;
- Recognizing and Responding to Suicide Risk in Youth;
- Recognizing and Responding to Signs of Violence in Youth;

- Limiting Access to Firearms (including legal requirements set forth in §[18.2-56.2](#) relating to the safe storage of firearms in the presence of minors);
- Limiting Access to Medications & Substances;
- Limiting Access to Ligatures; and
- Limiting Access to Knives.

CLOSING

Consistent, empathetic communication empowers parents as vital allies in promoting student safety and well-being. Providing clear guidance and practical resources not only helps families take meaningful action but also strengthens the partnership between home and school. By following these dissemination protocols and material selection criteria, school divisions can ensure that parents and caregivers receive timely, accurate, and supportive information during critical moments. Together, these efforts foster a safer, more responsive school community for all students.

APPENDIX

Sample Materials for Parents and Caregivers

All of the following caregiver materials can be located on the VDOE's [Supporting Student Safety: Parent and Caregiver Resources for Suicide and Violence Prevention](#) webpage. The following materials can be edited to include division-specific information such as logos, contact information, local resources, etc.

1. [Safety Action Steps for Parents and Caregivers: Tools and Strategies for Keeping Your Child Safe](#)
2. [A Guide for Caregivers: Recognizing and Responding to Signs of Self-Harm](#)
3. [A Guide for Caregivers: Recognizing and Responding to Suicide Risk](#)
4. [A Guide for Caregivers: Recognizing and Responding to Signs of Violence](#)
5. [A Guide for Caregivers: Limiting Access to Firearms](#)
6. [A Guide for Caregivers: Limiting Access to Medications & Substances](#)
7. [A Guide for Caregivers: Limiting Access to Ligatures](#)
8. [A Guide for Caregivers: Limiting Access to Knives and Sharp Objects](#)

Additional Safety and Support Resources for Parents and Caregivers

1. [Understanding Youth Mental Health and Preventing Unauthorized Access to Firearms](#): The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) developed this guide to address firearm safety, suicide prevention, and safeguarding mental health. This resource is for parents to learn more about mental health, how to recognize if their children need help, and what to do if the warning signs for suicide or other concerning behaviors are there.
2. [Lock and Talk Virginia](#): Information for families on how to identify the signs of a mental health crisis in their loved ones, and what resources are available to help, including a map of local community service boards.
3. [Threat Assessment Video for Parents](#), created by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, provides an overview of the threat assessment process used in Virginia K-12 public schools. It explains that threat assessment is a structured, evidence-based process designed to identify and intervene with individuals who may pose a risk of violence to themselves or others.
4. [OK2SpeakOut Parent Resources](#) offers a variety of information and tools to help parents talk with their teens, recognize warning signs, and support their child's mental health. It includes public service announcements and emphasizes the importance of being prepared to listen and engage in open conversations, while reminding users to seek immediate help in emergencies.
5. [Lock to Live](#): A free tool designed to help you make decisions about temporarily reducing access to potentially dangerous things, like firearms, medicines, sharp objects, or other household items.

6. [Suicide is Different](#): Providing support for suicide caregivers, Suicide Is Different, offers a variety of resources and tools to help you assist loved ones who may be struggling with suicide.
7. [Phrases for Validating Your Child](#): Validating a child’s emotions helps them feel seen, heard, and supported, which builds emotional intelligence, trust, and resilience. Here are several helpful phrases parents can use during difficult conversations with their children.
8. [Meaningful Questions to Connect with Your Child](#): This resource has questions designed to spark deeper conversations and provide greater insight into your child’s emotional and social experiences.
9. [Helping Your Loved One Who is Suicidal: A Guide for Family and Friends](#): Provided by SAMHSA, this guide is designed to help families who have a loved one who is suicidal or has made a suicide attempt. It provides information on understanding suicide, warning signs, and action steps to take. Additionally, it provides guidance on how to prevent future attempts and keep your loved one safe.
10. [A Journey Toward Health and Hope: Your Handbook for Recovery After a Suicide Attempt](#): Provided by SAMHSA, this resource guides people through the first steps toward recovery and a hopeful future after a suicide attempt. It includes personal stories from survivors and strategies for recovery, such as re-establishing connections and finding a counselor.

Materials for Threat Assessment Teams

1. [Communicating with Parents About Self-Harm, Suicide, or Violence Risks](#): When a student has been identified as potentially at risk for self-harm, suicide, or harm to others, school staff play a vital role in ensuring that parents are informed in a timely, respectful, and supportive way. These conversations can be difficult but are essential for student safety and well-being. This resource provides threat assessment team members with 15 practical tips to help guide these critical discussions.
2. [Sample Safety Materials for Parents and Caregivers Webpage](#): This sample webpage can act as a template for the development of a local school or division webpage to house safety materials for parents and caregivers.
3. [Local Mental Health Supports for Students Template](#): School divisions can use this template to organize community support information for parents and caregivers as part of a student’s safety plan.
4. [Counseling on Access to Lethal Means Course](#): This free course is about how to reduce access to the methods people use to kill themselves. It covers who needs lethal means counseling and how to work with people at risk of suicide and their families to reduce access.
5. [Safe Storage of Firearms Video Series](#): A video series designed to support professionals in helping families take steps towards safer storage.
 - a) [How to Keep Teens Safer at Home](#): Model video for how to discuss firearm safety steps with parents.

6. [Suicide Risk Assessment: Parent Notification Form](#)
7. [Sample Student Support Plan](#)
8. [Sample Return to Learn Support Plan](#)
9. [Beyond the Threat Assessment: Best Practices for Developing Student Support Plans](#)
(Webinar Recording)
10. [Community Resource Finder](#)

Virginia Resource Repositories for Threat Assessment Teams

1. VDOE: [Suicide Prevention](#)
2. VDH: [The Campus Suicide Prevention Center of Virginia](#)
3. DBHDS: [Lock and Talk Virginia](#)
4. DCJS: [Threat Assessment in Virginia](#)

School Safety Materials Selection Checklist

Use this checklist to evaluate materials intended for parents on topics such as firearm safety, suicide prevention, and recognizing or responding to threatening behavior. This tool ensures that selected resources are evidence-based, supportive, and aligned with school and community values.

1. Credible Content

- Materials are based on current research and best practices from credible sources (e.g., DCJS, VDH, VDOE, CDC, SAMHSA, AAP, Secret Service Threat Assessment Center).
- Information aligns with relevant state and federal guidelines and laws related to youth mental health, suicide prevention, and threat assessment.
- Materials are reviewed and updated annually to ensure accuracy and relevance.

2. Accessible and Welcoming

- Materials are available in multiple languages.
- Materials are provided in both print and digital formats.
- Materials are compatible with screen readers and other accessibility tools.
- Content uses a supportive, nonjudgmental tone that is welcoming and free of stigma or stereotypes related to mental health, violence, or firearm ownership.
- Messaging emphasizes partnership and support rather than blame or fear.
- Language is empathetic and empowers parents and caregivers as key partners.
- Language and information are supportive and accepting of all family structures.

3. Clear and User Friendly

- Language is clear, jargon-free, and easily understood by parents and caregivers without specialized training.
- Visual aids such as infographics, charts, and bullet points are used to simplify complex topics.

4. Actionable Guidance

- Materials provide specific, practical steps parents and caregivers can take (e.g., safely storing firearms, recognizing warning signs, seeking mental health support).
- Contact information for local and national crisis lines, mental health services, and school-based supports is included.

5. Vetted and Approved by Experts

- Materials have been reviewed and approved by qualified professionals (e.g., school counselors, psychologists, social workers, administrators, community service providers, law enforcement, threat assessment team members).

- Materials have been shared with and reviewed by the local superintendent or school board.

6. Consistency with School and Community Policies

- Materials align with the school's threat assessment protocols, safety plans, and mental health procedures.
- Materials complement and do not contradict other school or community policies and programs.

7. Repository of Materials

A comprehensive repository of materials is maintained and accessible to threat assessment teams that contains information on the following:

Repository includes resources covering:

- Safety action steps for supervision (including digital devices and social media)
- Curated list of local mental health supports
- Recognizing and responding to signs of self-harm
- Recognizing and responding to suicide risk in youth
- Recognizing and responding to signs of violence in youth
- Limiting access to firearms (including legal requirements set forth in § [18.2-56.2](#) relating to the safe storage of firearms in the presence of minors)
- Limiting access to medications and substances
- Limiting access to ligatures
- Limiting access to knives