

An Overview of Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management in Virginia K-12 Public Schools

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A Thought to Frame our Time Today

***“The best detectors are not gun detectors;
the best detectors are human detectors.”***

– Dr. William Pollack,
PBS Documentary,
“The Pathway to Violence”

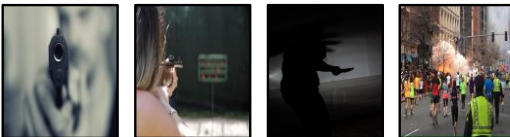


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OK2Speakout



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Goals of the Session

- Understand K-12 legislative requirements
- Understand why violence prevention is possible and how threat assessment works
- Understand key concepts related to targeted violence and the practice of threat assessment and management
- Understand the role of Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management teams

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Legislation, Code of Virginia

§ 9.1-184

- VCSOS is mandated to provide schools with a model policy for the establishment of threat assessment teams, and to
- Develop a case management tool for the collection and reporting of data by threat assessment teams

§ 18.2-83

- Charges for Threats to Bomb, Damage, or Discharge a Firearm

§ 18.2-60

- Charges for Threats of Death or Bodily Injury

§ 22.1-272.1

- Requires licensed as administrative or instructional personnel who believes a student is at imminent risk of suicide would provide suicide prevention and safe storage of firearms materials/limiting access to lethal means
- Requires VDOE, DBHDS, and VDH to develop guidelines around parental contact

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Legislation, Code of Virginia Continued

§ 22.1-79.4

- Threat Assessment Teams and Oversight Committee Requirements for schools and divisions
- Requirements for Threat Assessment Team Membership
- SRO required if employed and serving in school division
- Training requirements for new and existing team members
- Each threat assessment team shall collect, report to the Center quantitative data, using the case management tool developed by the Center
- Requirement for teams to provide guidance to students, faculty, and staff regarding recognition of threatening or aberrant behavior, identify members of the school community to whom threatening behavior should be reported, and implement policies adopted by the local school board
- Requires division superintendents (or their designee) to
 - notify the parents suspected school-connected overdose within 24 hours of learning of the suspected overdose
 - provide the student's parent/legal guardian 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

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Threat Assessment Team: § 22.1-79.4 Continued

- **Membership**
 - Counseling
 - Instruction
 - School administration
 - Law enforcement (SRO)
- **Other Expertise (?)**
- **Oversight Committee**
 - Not required
 - Include HR
- **Scope**
 - Individuals
 - Who?
- **Team Responsibilities**
 - Provide guidance
 - Identify who threats are reported to
 - Students posing a threat/notifications

Who else could be included either as a core member of a TAT or as someone consulted with when specialized expertise would be of value?

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Additional Reporting and Information Sharing Considerations

Upon a preliminary determination by the threat assessment team that an individual:

- poses a threat of violence to self or others **or**
- exhibits significantly disruptive behavior **or** a need for assistance

Then a threat assessment team may obtain:

- Criminal history record information per the *Code of Virginia* § 19.2-389 or § 19.2-389.1, and
- Health records per the *Code of Virginia* § 32.1-127.1:03
- No TAT member shall:
 - Redisclose any such criminal history or health information or
 - Use any such record beyond the purpose for which such disclosure was made to the team

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NEW Legislative Requirement Effective July 1, 2025

D. "...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 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. Such materials shall be selected in accordance with the provisions of the criteria set forth in the guidelines required by subsection G."

G. "The (local school) Board, in cooperation with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Department of Health, **shall develop guidelines** for the provision of 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 required pursuant to subsection D. Such guidelines shall include criteria for selecting such materials as well as materials that have been preapproved for such use by the Board."

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Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines



[Threat Assessment and Management in Virginia Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines, 5th Edition \(Virginia DCJS, 2023\)](#)



Consider other key resources including:

[DCJS: Information Sharing Guide for K12 Public Schools \(2020\)](#)

[VDOE: Suicide Prevention Guidelines for Virginia Public Schools \(2020\)](#)

[USSS: Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence \(2018\)](#)

[FBI: Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks \(2017\)](#)

[Averting Targeted School Violence: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Plots Against Schools](#)

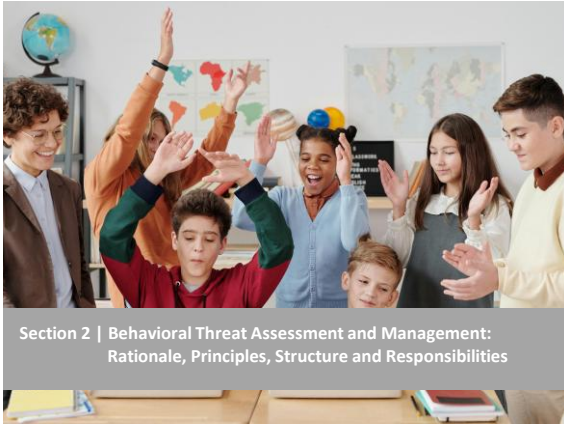
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Why are We Here?

Beyond the law:

- Research and practice tell us that **targeted violence is often detectable and preventable.**
- Threat assessment and management has evolved as a standard of practice for proactive approaches to prevention of violence impacting schools.
- Threat assessment and management processes are designed to identify and assist persons in need as early as possible.
- **Team members need a solid foundation for understanding violence as well as principles and practices for effective threat management.**

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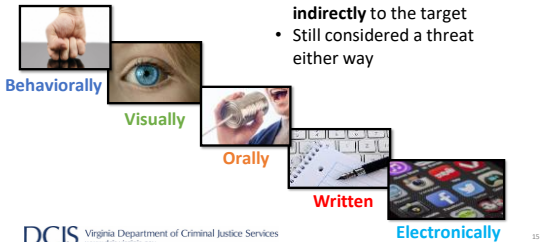


Section 2 | Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management: Rationale, Principles, Structure and Responsibilities

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What is a Threat?

- Concerning communication or behavior
- Indicates individual may **pose** a danger to the school community
- Through acts of violence/behavior to cause harm to self or others (or both)
- Communicated **directly** or **indirectly** to the target
- Still considered a threat either way



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What is

“Threat Assessment and Management”?

Threat assessment and management is a **fact-based, systematic**, process emphasizing an **appraisal of observed** (or reasonably observable) **behaviors** to identify potentially dangerous or violent situations, to assess them, and to manage/address them. (Model Policies)

1. How do staff, parents, and students view the process?
2. Who does not understand the role and function of the threat assessment team as well as you would like?

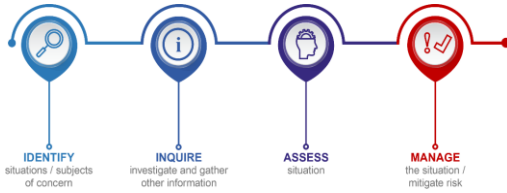
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Threat Assessment and Management: An Integrated and Systematic Approach

Threat Assessment and Management Process



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What is Concerning or Aberrant Behavior?

Concerning behavior:

- Behaviors or communications that cause concern for:
 - > The health, safety, or well-being of the subject
 - > Their impact on the health, safety, or well-being of others, or...
 - > Both (for self and others)

Aberrant behavior:

- Behaviors or communications that are **unusual or atypical** for the person or situation, and that cause concern for the health, safety or well-being of the subject, others, or both.

For further consideration:

1. Do all aberrant or atypical behaviors cause concern?
2. Do various groups in the community view behaviors differently?

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Threat Assessment and Management Goal

The primary goal of the threat assessment and management process is to support and enhance the health, safety, and well-being of the **school community**.

Threat Assessment and Management in Virginia K-12 Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines, 5th Edition (DCJS, 2023).

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Key Findings Regarding Targeted Violence



Safe School Initiative (USSS & US DOE, 2002)



A Study of Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters 2000-2013 (FBI, 2018)



Protecting America's Schools (USSS, 2019)



Averting Targeted School Violence (USSS, 2021)



Indicators of School Crime and Safety (US DOE, 2022)



Crime, Violence, Discipline, & Safety in U.S. Public Schools (US DOE, 2022)

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Fact or Fiction?

School attacks are often sudden, impulsive acts.

Fiction

Removing a student from school eliminates the risk they pose to self/others.

Fiction

In 2/3 of averted attacks, plotters had unimpeded access to firearms.

Fact

Many attackers were bullied prior to the attack.

Fact

People often have no idea of the attacker's ideas or plans.

Fiction

There is no profile for the types of schools that have been targeted.

Fact

Most attackers threatened their target directly prior to the attack.

Fiction

Sources: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Secret Service, and the National Threat Assessment Center. Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence (2019). Averting Targeted School Violence: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Threats Against Schools (2021).

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Principles of Threat Assessment

BTAM takes a holistic approach to assessment and management

- Targeted violence stems from an interaction among:

- Subject(s),
- Target(s),
- Environment, and
- Precipitating events

STEP® Framework



© DeLinger (1996), DeLinger and Nolen (2021)

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Principles of Threat Assessment

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

Pathway to Violence

Adapted from:
Cathoun and Weston (2003)




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Principles of Threat Assessment

- **Threat assessment is about prevention, not prediction.**
- Effective threat assessment is based on **observations of behavior** rather than on general characteristics, traits, or profiles.
- Information is likely to be scattered and fragmented. A collaborative and coordinated approach is required.
- The key is to act quickly upon an initial report of concern, gather other pieces of the puzzle, and then assemble to see what picture emerges.
- The relationship between mental illness and violence is complex but not necessarily correlative.

 [Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence](#)

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Section 3 | Identifying and Reporting Concerning, Aberrant, or Threatening Behaviors

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Steps in the Threat Assessment Process

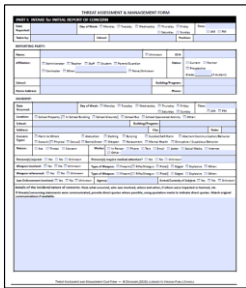
Threat assessment team:

1. Receives report of threat
 - Intake: Obtaining and processing basic information about the situation
 - **Initial triage: Assigning urgency/priority to cases**
 - **Triage and screening: Determining appropriateness, comprehensive assessment**
2. Gathers additional relevant information
3. Analyzes information and assesses threat
 - *If the team decides subject **poses** a threat:
 - Team alerts superintendent
 - Responds to manage threat
4. Monitors and re-evaluates plan
5. Follow up as appropriate



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Documentation



- **Threat Assessment Records**
 - Storage
 - Recommended Practice
 - Electronic considerations
 - Legal counsel
 - **Retention**
 - Library of VA – Retention schedule
 - [§ 42.1-85](#)

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Key Areas for Inquiry

The diagram features a central circular graphic with the word 'STEP' in the middle. Surrounding it are four puzzle pieces representing the letters S, T, E, and P. Each letter is accompanied by a small image: 'S' shows a person with a rifle, 'T' shows a distressed child, 'E' shows a person reading, and 'P' shows a calendar.

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Additional Key Areas for Inquiry

What is the consistency, credibility, and completeness of information about the situation?

- Are the subject’s conversation and “story” consistent?
- Do collateral sources confirm or dispute each other?
- What gaps exist in understanding of the situation?
- What biases or misperceptions may be present?

Source: Desinger (1996); Desinger and Nolan (2020)

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Threats to Self: The Nexus Between Threat Assessment and Suicide Risk Assessment

Benefits of utilizing the TAT within the suicide risk assessment process:

- Consistency
- Legal access to information
- Broader scope of information to guide the process
- Confidentiality
- **The trained mental health professional takes the lead on the suicide risk assessment.**
 - Reports information back to the TAT
- If it is a threat to harm self and others, TAT must complete a threat assessment

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Considerations Regarding Subject Removal

Leave, suspension, or termination options that focus solely on removing the subject of concern do not address the long-term challenges of:

- Moving the subject away from thoughts and plans of, and capacity for, violence and/or disruption
- Connecting subject to resources (where needed)
- Mitigating environmental/systemic factors
- Monitoring the subject when they are no longer connected to the organization

Use removal strategies with intentionality, awareness of limitations, and anticipation of consequences.

Source: Deisinger (1996), Deisinger and Nolan (2020)

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Facilitate Bystander Engagement

Facilitate engagement:

- Emphasize that it is everyone’s role and responsibility to share and address concerns
- Identify concerning, aberrant, threatening, and prohibited behaviors to be reported
- Establish and promote effective reporting mechanisms
- Establish and identify how and where concerns can be reported
- Respond to reports in a timely and effective manner
- Provide regular reminders of issues and process

[USSS and DOE \(2008\) Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence](#)
[Police Foundation \(2019\) A Comparison of Averted and Completed School Attacks from the Police Foundation Averted School Violence Database](#)
[Craun, Gibson, et al \(2020\). \(In\)action: Variation in Bystander Responses Between Persons of Concern and Active Shooters](#)
[USDHS \(2023\) Improving Safety through Bystander Reporting](#)

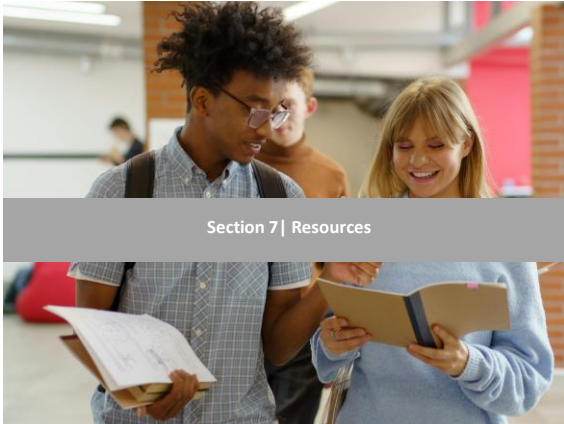


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Summary

- Virginia law requires threat assessment teams, policy, and reporting.
- Threat assessment is an established standard of practice to support school violence prevention.
- Utilizing Community BTAM as a public health approach to violence prevention can bolster community safety.
- Consult with VCSCS, colleagues, and threat assessment experts regarding concerns.

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BTAM Resources

- [What Threat Assessment Is and Is Not \(NTAC\)](#)
- [Summary of Key BTAM Concepts](#)
- [Behavioral Threat Assessment Resource Toolkit for K-12 Virginia Schools](#)
- [Behavioral Threat Assessment Resource Toolkit for K-12 Virginia Parents](#)
- [Ok2Speakout](#)

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BTAM Training Courses



BASIC TRAINING



CASE MANAGEMENT



DIGITAL TA



LEGAL ISSUES



TITLE IX



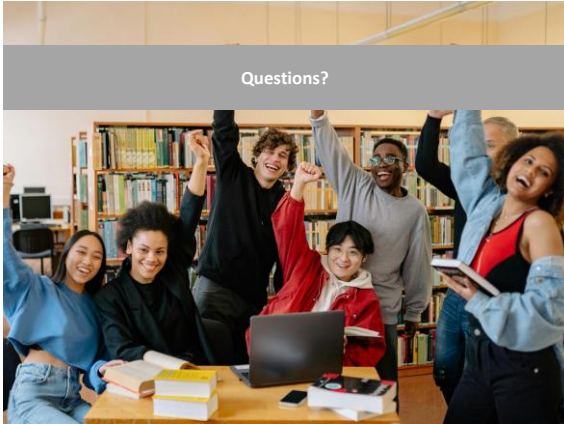
SPECIAL ISSUES



TRAIN THE TRAINER

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Resources and Contact Information

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[K-12 Behavioral Threat Assessment Resources](#)

Robin Tuck
Behavioral Threat Assessment Program Coordinator
 (804) 987-5103
Robin.Tuck@dcjs.virginia.gov

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