

PROVIDING FOR SCHOOL AND STUDENT SAFETY I:

THREAT ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION PLANNING

Linda M. Kanan, Ph.D.

Ohio School Psychologists Association
November 9, 2017



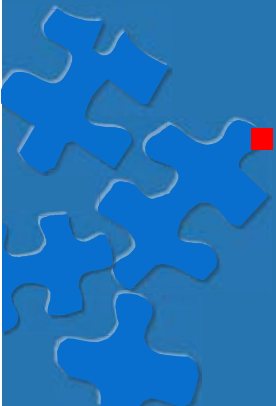
Today's Objectives

1. Understand and implement the essential elements of a threat assessment process in schools
2. Conduct the steps of a threat assessment inquiry in schools
3. Design appropriate and effective action and support plans and intervention for students that can help to provide for school and student safety and well-being.

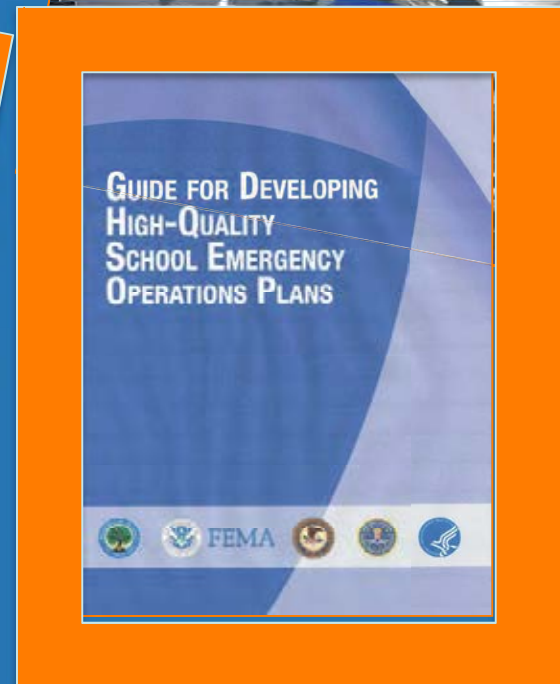
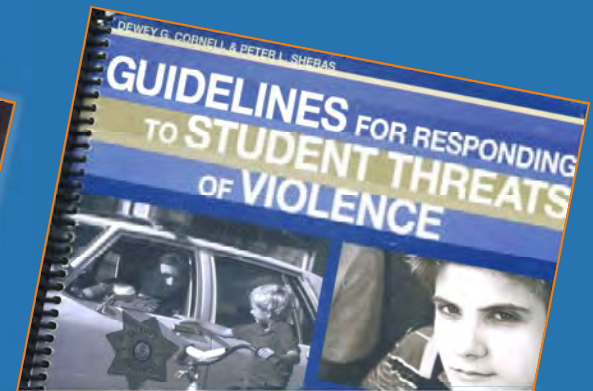
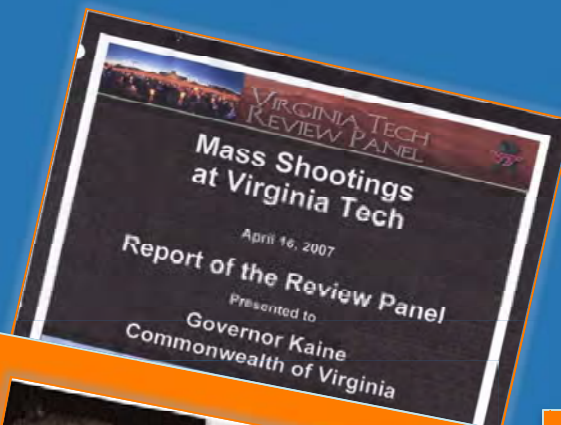
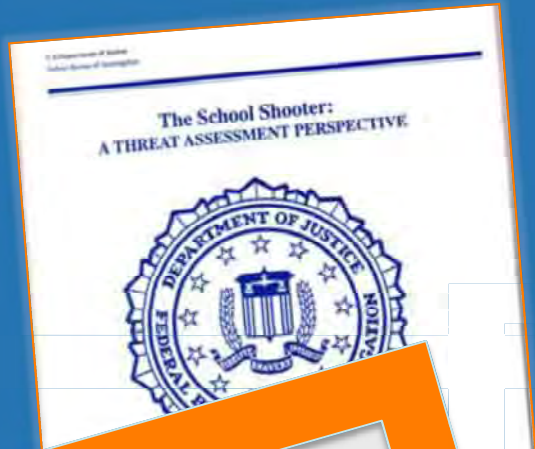


What Have We Learned?

- Threats of **ALL kinds** continue to affect schools and communities
- Challenges to school safety come from inside the school **AND** outside the school
- There is no “one size fits all solution”
- Many schools and communities have taken good steps to work together
- *Good threat assessment teams and processes work to keep schools safe!*



Guidance from Various Resources



Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans

Developed by 6 Federal Agencies

Summer, 2013

Descriptor	Purpose
<p>A school threat assessment analyzes communication and behaviors to determine whether or not a student, staff, or other person may pose a threat. These assessments must be based on fact, must comply with applicable privacy, civil rights, and other applicable laws, and are often conducted by multidisciplinary threat assessment teams. While a planning team may include the creation of a threat assessment team in its plan, the assessment team is a separate entity from the planning team and meets on its own regular schedule.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students, staff, or other persons that may pose a threat are identified before a threat develops into an incident and are referred for services, if appropriate.

Lessons Learned:

Final Report & Findings of the Safe School Initiative, 2002

1. There is no accurate or useful profile of students who engage in targeted school violence
2. Most did not threaten their target directly before attack
3. Incidents of violence were rarely sudden, impulsive acts
4. Other people knew about the attacker's idea & plan to attack
5. Most attackers engaged in some behavior that caused others concern or indicated a need for help

Lessons Learned:

Final Report & Findings of the Safe School Initiative, 2002

6. Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failure
7. Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted or injured by others
8. Most had access to and had used weapons before the attack
9. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity
10. Most attacks were stopped by means other than law enforcement

What the Kids Say

US
2015

Carried a weapon on school property at least 1 day in past 30 days

4.1%

Carried a weapon at least 1 day in past 30 days

16.2%

Threatened or injured with weapon on school property (once or more in past 12 months)

6.0%

Did not go to school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school (at least 1 day in past 30)

5.6%

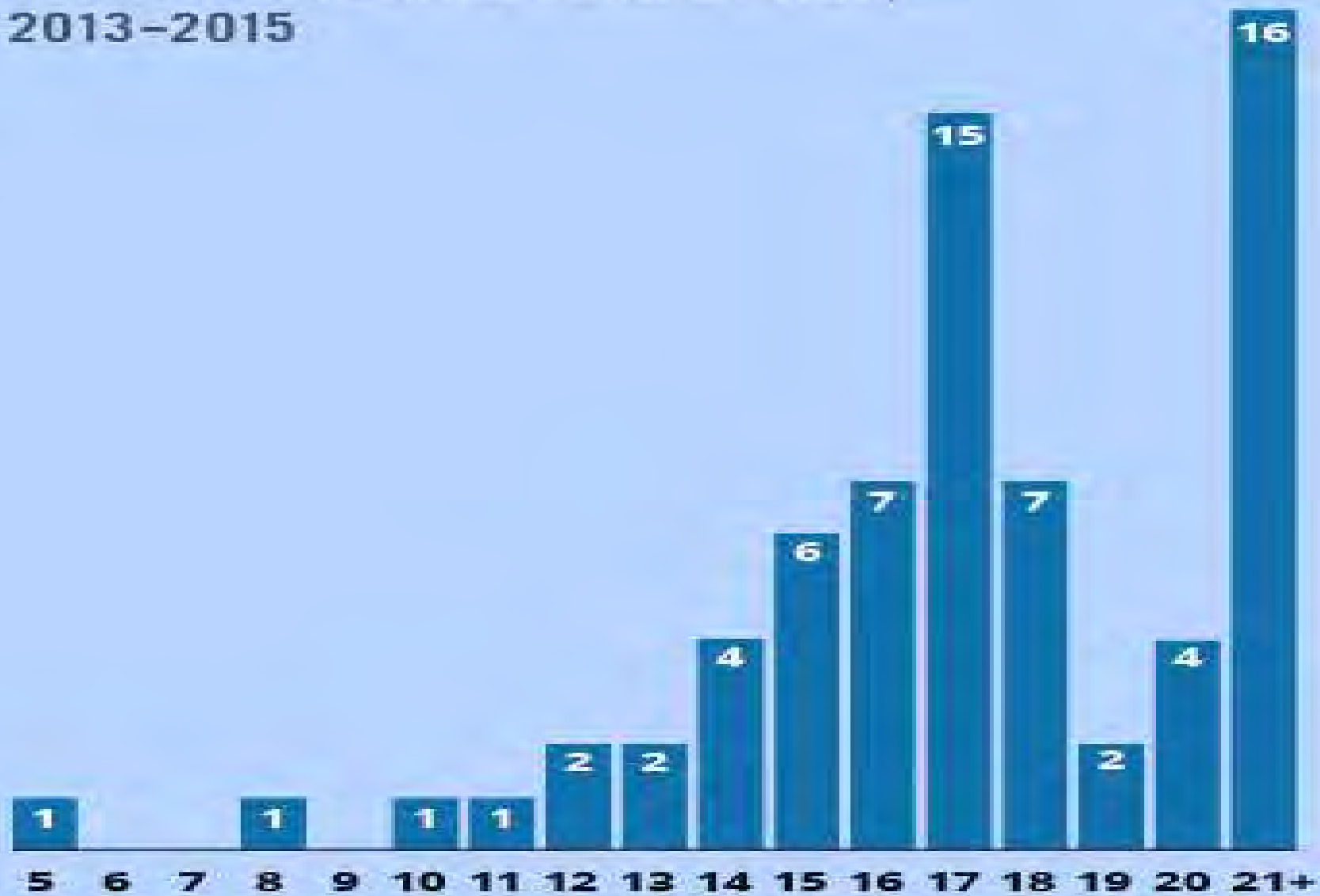
Shootings at K-12 Schools by School-type, 2013-2015

- High School = 35
- Middle School = 13
- Elementary = 24
- K-12 = 2



<http://everytownresearch.org/documents/2015/04/analysis-of-school-shootings.pdf>

K-12 SCHOOL SHOOTERS BY AGE, 2013-2015



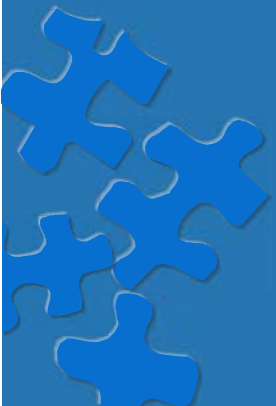
CDC School Associated Violent Death Study

- Between 14 & 34 school-age children are victims of homicide on school grounds or on their way to & from school every year.
- Most school-associated violent deaths occur during transitions –before & after the school day & during lunch.
- More likely to occur at the start of each semester.
- Nearly 50 percent of homicide perpetrators gave some type of warning signal, such as making a threat or leaving a note, prior to the event.
- Firearms used in school-associated homicides & suicides came primarily from perpetrator's home, from friends or relatives.

Young Kids Making Threats

“I’m going to cut your brake lines.”

-statement made by 5th grade student to his teacher

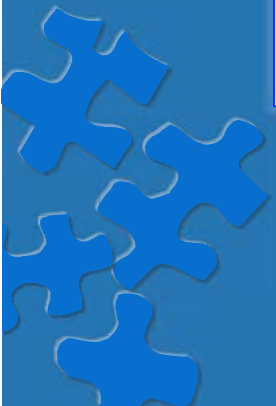


Indirect and Direct Verbal Statements

“You know, it’s people like you that make people like me want to bring guns to school.”

“I should bring a gun to school and shoot you.”

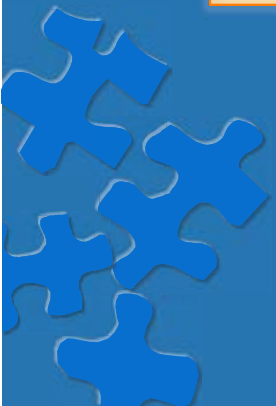
-Jeff, 11th grade



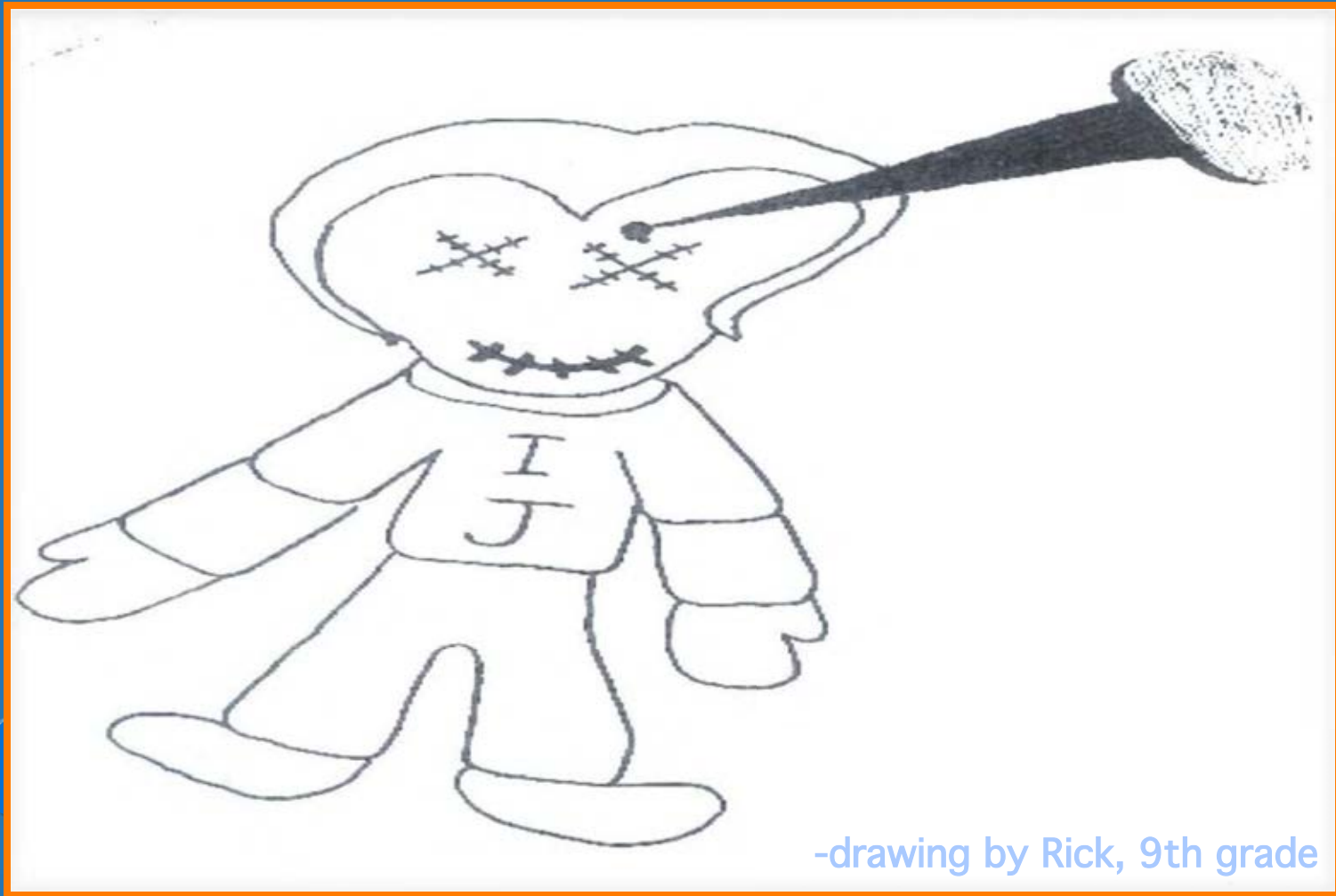
Writing in Classrooms or Journals

Well, since I am not welcome in Borora,
I should go on a shooting rampage.
By doing this I kill 713 members of my
school and also 21 of the staff members.
After this I decide my life is not worth living
so Borora should be destroyed.

-Written by Brian, 9th grade
as a response to a teacher assignment



Drawings



-drawing by Rick, 9th grade

Threats on the Internet, You Tube & Social Media

On April 20th, I will be following in the footsteps of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold and will commit a massacre at my school equipped with a tec-9, M16, and 70 rounds of ammo for both weapons which I will conceal under a black trench coat and will later commit suicide after a 10 minute standoff with the police. I will finish off the job started by REB & VoDKa back in 1999 and will wear a black KoRn t-shirt on the day of the shooting which will later be dripping with my own bullie's blood.

From a posting on You Tube, reported to authorities

**Are You Ready To Conduct
A Threat Assessment?**



Essential Foundation Elements

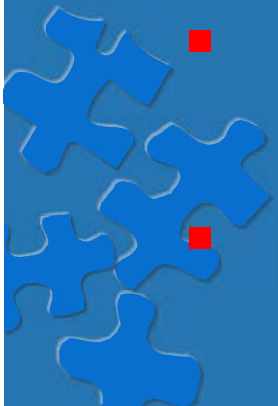
Colorado School Safety Resource Center
2010-2016

1. Establish authority and leadership to conduct an inquiry.
2. Develop a multidisciplinary threat assessment team that is based in the school or district and *provide ongoing training.*
3. Establish integrated and interagency systems relationships and partnerships to respond to public safety concerns.
4. Provide awareness training for staff, students, parents and community partners in warning signs of violence and reporting procedures.

Elements of a School Threat Assessment Process

1. Authority and leadership to conduct an inquiry

- A formal policy and established procedures are recommended
- District and building leadership must support the process and designate a team
- Information sharing to establish a “vortex” of information must support the process
- Are threat assessment duties part of your job description?



Are You Clear About Information Sharing?

- Information must be obtained from a variety of sources during the threat assessment process
- FERPA has relevant exceptions that allow information to be shared
- May disclose information to appropriate parties when knowledge of the information is necessary ***to protect the health and safety of a student or other individual***, if there is a significant and articulable threat to the health and safety of an individual

Understanding Limits to Confidentiality

- Information covered by FERPA can be disclosed to other school staff. For example, disciplinary action taken against a student for conduct that posed a significant risk to the safety or well-being of that student or others CAN be disclosed to *school staff who have legitimate interests in the behavior of that student.*

Sec 99.36(b)2

- Such information can be disclosed to staff of another school who have legitimate educational interests in the behavior of that student.

Sec 99.36 (b)3

Education Records	Not Education Records
Transcripts	Records that are kept in the sole possession of the maker and used only as personal memory aids
Disciplinary Records	Law Enforcement Unit Records
Standardized Test Results	Grades on peer-graded papers before they are collected and recorded by a teacher
Health (including mental health) and family history records	Records created or received by a school after an individual is no longer in attendance and that are not directly related to the individual's attendance at the school
Records on services provided to students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Employee records that relate exclusively to an individual in that individual's capacity as an employee
Records on services and accommodations provided to students under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the ADA	Information obtained through school official's personal knowledge or observation and not from the student's education records

Other Important Considerations

- Ethical considerations for psychologists
- Assessor competence
- Use of risk factor checklists
 - Use as evidence of need for intervention services
- Threat assessment was **not** designed for assessing all interpersonal disputes
- Should also be embedded in a general approach that focuses on teaching student conflict management skills
- **Should be part of *multiple prevention efforts***

(Griffiths, A., Sharkey, J., & Furlong, M., 2008)

Additional Legal & Ethical Issues in Threat Assessment

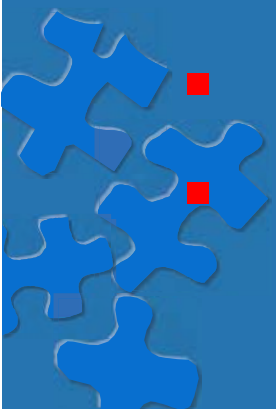
(Jacob, Decker & Hartshorne, 2011)

- Procedures should ensure that:
 - The intended victim is warned.
 - If threats are made against a minor child, the parents of the threatened child must be notified.
 - Parents of a potentially assaultive student must be informed of the situation.
 - The potentially violent student should be supervised in the school setting and at home, and steps should be taken to ensure there is no access to weapons.
 - Mental health practitioners should be prepared to refer the family to a community mental health agency.

Elements of a School Threat Assessment Process

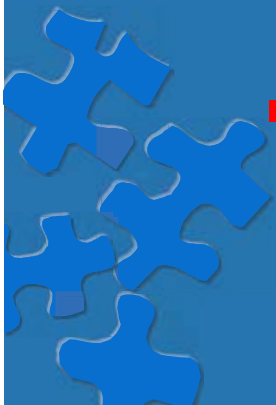
2. Ongoing planning to develop and train a multi-disciplinary threat assessment team that is based in the school or school district

- Existing teams may already exist
- Roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined
- Leadership should be established
- Train your team members together!
- Use experiential exercises and tabletops like for other drills and practice



Primary Roles of the School Team

- To guide the assessment inquiry and participate in gathering of information
- Provide management of the situation of concern at the school level
- Provide ongoing monitoring
- To develop interventions
 - (Action and Support Plans)
- Documentation

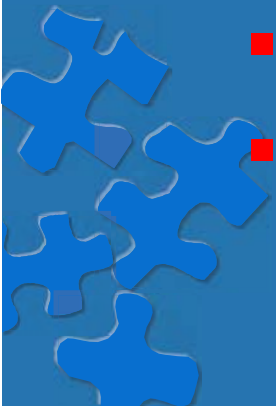


Suggested Membership of a Team

- Three members are recommended
 - Phone consultation may also be used if a small school
-
1. Administrator ***who has been trained***
 - May be chair or designate the chairperson
 2. School disciplinary or safety personnel
 3. Mental health professional, such as school psychologist, social worker, or counselor ***with training in threat assessment***

Other Suggested Members of the Team

- School Resource Officer or Local Law Enforcement
- Teachers, coaches who know the student well
- Nurse
- Representative of IEP Team (if threat assessment of special education student)
- Transportation bus drivers
- Custodial and cafeteria staff



Other Suggested Members of the Team

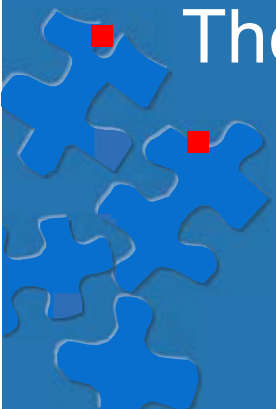
- Community members may also have relevant information and/or can provide needed services:
 - Probation Officers
 - Department of Human Services case workers
 - Those providing services or who have relevant knowledge of the student (i.e. therapists, etc.)

Note: Suicide Assessments must be conducted by trained professionals – Prior planning is required

The Importance of Multi-Agency Communication

3. Integrated systems relationships and partnerships established to respond to public safety concerns

- Do you have additional state statutes that support multi-agency information sharing of information related to youth?
- There is a value to written agreements
- Can identify the types of concerns that will be shared



Elements of a School Threat Assessment Process

4. Awareness training for staff, students, parents and community partners in the warning signs of violence and other dangerous behaviors

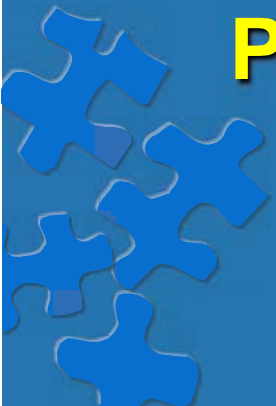
Include training about reporting procedures!

- What should they report?
- Whom should they tell?
- Timely information is IMPORTANT!

LESSONS LEARNED:

Train for Awareness!

**Early Detection And Reporting Begins
Prevention and Intervention**



Why Awareness Training?

Safety, security, and
the well-being of
students...
It's everyone's job...



**Behavior of concern or a threat to
safety and welfare of a student, the
school, or community MUST be
reported in a timely manner**

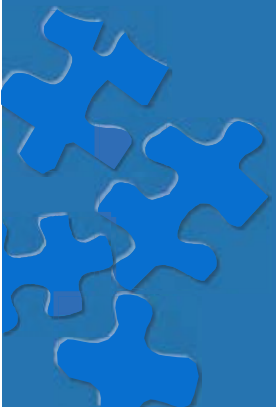
Key Recommendation: Awareness Training

- Awareness training needs to be explicit, repeated yearly across employee groups, students, parents, and community. It's early detection of potential threats.
 - What to watch for (behaviors)
 - What to report
 - How to report: within school, district, use of reporting lines (emphasize *multiple methods*)
 - Importance of timely reporting



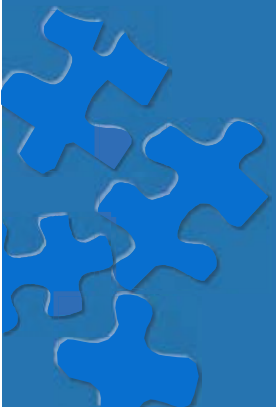
Early Detection and Reporting

- *Appropriate use* of warning sign indicators
- Staff training with emphasis on FERPA *exceptions to confidentiality*



Lessons Learned: Awareness

- ALL faculty and staff need to be trained on a standard protocol to improve understanding of detecting, reporting, and analysis of concerning behaviors.
- For good prevention, awareness is needed about *various behaviors* of concern
- Can also be used for awareness of suicide, child abuse, signs of depression, harassment, drug & alcohol use, universal precautions, etc.



Basics of Awareness Training for Students

- Multiple means for student reporting are encouraged
 - Tell a trusted adult, use tip lines, calling, texting
- Tattling v. telling discussions
- ***Telling keeps people safe*** – for all dangerous behavior
- Some cautions
 - How are reports monitored?



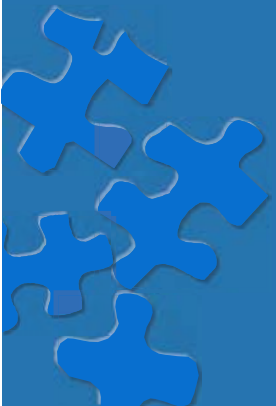
Six Principles of Threat Assessment

1. Targeted violence is the end result of an understandable process of thinking & behavior.
2. Targeted violence stems from an interaction between the individual, the situation, the setting, & the target.
3. ***An investigative, skeptical, inquisitive mindset is needed.***
4. Effective threat assessment is based on facts, rather than characteristics or “traits.”
5. An “integrated systems approach” is best.
6. ***Investigate whether or not a student poses a threat, not whether a student has made a threat.***

(US Secret Service & US Department of Education, 2002)

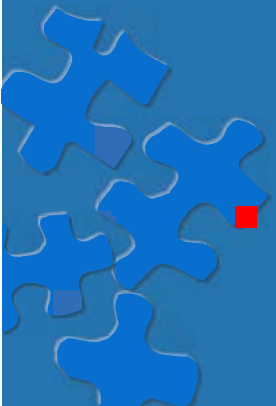
Understanding Threats

- **Direct Threat**
 - statement of clear intent to harm
- **Indirect Threat**
 - violence is implied - threat is phrased tentatively
- **Conditional Threat**
 - made contingent on set of circumstances, “if” or “or” statements
- **Veiled Threat**
 - vague & subject to interpretation



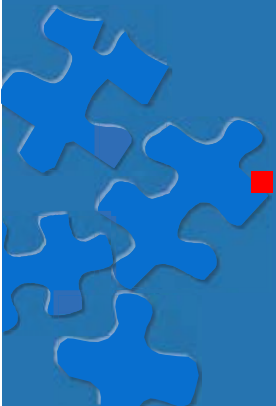
Some Triggering Events for a Threat Assessment

- Student directly or indirectly threatens to harm person, group, and/or entire school
- Artistic, written, or symbolic expression with disturbing and/or violent content
- Report that someone may possess a weapon on campus
- Student demonstrates concerning warning signs & behaviors



Some Triggering Events for a Threat Assessment

- Student makes threat to harm or kill self (along with threats to others, or additional factors)
- Student has escalating pattern of behavior that has been resistive to intervention at school
- ***Other reasons?***



A Model for Understanding & Responding to Threats: Key Concepts

- Watching for AVENGERS
- PRACTICE sessions
- Establishing a VORTEX of information
- TREES of intervention

Nicoletti, J. (2007, 2010). Managing threats in schools.

Nicoletti, J. (2013). Detection, Disruption & Threat Assessment in Schools.



Watching for Avengers

1. Perceived injustice
2. Feeling victimized
3. Externalization of responsibility
 - Development of a grudge
 - Obsessed with Avenging
 - Avenging Action
- Language reveals a lot!
- Watch for the word “because”
- They will broadcast it



Practicing Violence: The Importance of Trees



- Avengers have a progression...a series of behavioral changes
- There will always be practice sessions.
- Practice sessions involve pushing the edge of the envelope.
- Practice can be writing, drawing, comments, actions
- Practice sessions will increase when there are no “trees”.
- When a tree is placed after a practice session, they either back off, go around it, or go over it... **YOU MUST MONITOR!**

Nicoletti, J. (2010)

A Formula for Violent Acts

- Time
- Opportunity
- Ability
- Desire
- Stimulus



Nicoletti, J. & Spencer-Thomas, S. (2002). *Violence goes to school*.
Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

A Vortex of Information is Essential *(It's Your Team!)*



- A communication vortex is the knowledge base
- Centralizes information
- Incidents and responses can be tracked over time
- Helps determine patterns of behavior
- Procedure for reporting concerns to the team must be clear
- Must be formalized
- Must act on the data

Examining Student Behavior

1. Normal Behaviors

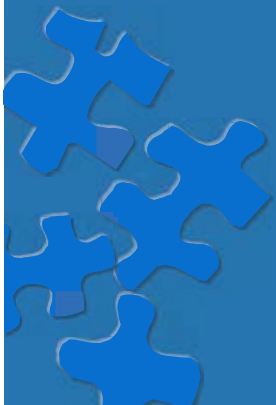
- Establishing normal

2. Boundary Probing Behaviors

- Pushing the rules & tolerance levels

3. Social & Psychological Disruption

- Actions that interfere with functioning of organization and/or cause people to feel intimidated, harassed, fearful, etc.



Examining Student Behavior

4. Attack Related Behaviors

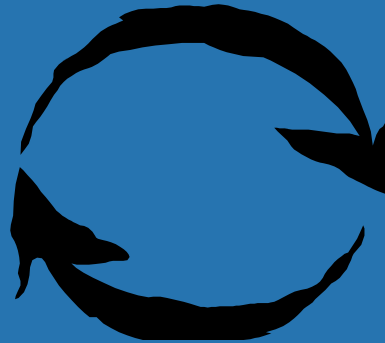
- Desensitization
- Dehumanization
- Skill set or armament building
- Planning

5. Attack Behaviors (proactive or reactive)

- People
- Property



The Cycle Of Threat Assessment



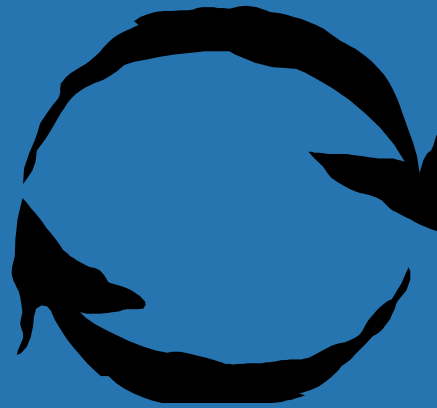
With thanks to the 2009-10 Threat Assessment Work Group of the Colorado School Safety Resource Center

See handout



The Threat Assessment Cycle

- Threat Assessment is NOT a one time process
- Must be supported by awareness training and timely reporting



*Law Enforcement should be contacted ANY time information suggests the need for immediate law enforcement assistance

**Suicide Assessment should include a trained professional, prior planning is required