1. The Process Begins

What is your threshold??

Does everyone know what signals a concern for a threat assessment?

- Warning signs reported
- Concerning behaviors observed
- Indirect or direct threat occurs
- Signals a public safety concern or concern for the safety or welfare of the school or community
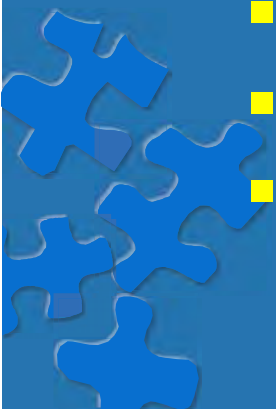
2. Report of Concern is Made

- Reported to school
- Reported in an anonymous reporting method
- Reported to Law Enforcement

3. Action and Notification Occurs

The School:
- Secures safety
- Notifies Law enforcement as indicated
- Assembles the school threat assessment team and conducts threat assessment inquiry

4. School Evaluates Level of Concern

- Use a team and Threat Assessment Inquiry Steps

- Use multiple data sources

- *Ask the "Eleven Key Questions" from US Secret Service*

- Determine level of concern

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

5. Determine Level of Concern

- Take appropriate action equal to the level of concern

  - *Low concern* at this time based on available information

  - *Medium* or lingering concern

  - *High concern* requiring law enforcement assistance or mental health hold and evaluation

Monitoring is provided for <u>all</u> levels of concern

O'Toole, M.E. (2000). The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective. Quantico, VA: National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

6. Concern is Stabilized: Develop an Action and Support Plan

- Based on the level of concern

- Plan for re-entry of the student after discipline or evaluation

- Student monitoring continues

- Use an interagency or collaborative team, in addition to the school team, as needed

- ***Know and use*** *your community resources*

7. Document the Behavior of Concern

Document:

- The behavior or reason for concern
- The inquiry participants
- The Action and Support Plan

Questions for Your Team:

- Where are the records of threat assessments kept?
- Is there a central record at your district?
- Can you find out about previous concerns?
- How are records passed to new school or level?

Lessons Learned:
Documenting the Threat Assessment

- Threat assessment documentation forms should be:
    - standardized,
    - completed in detail, and
    - legible.
    - Attach supporting information, if any

- Threat assessment team members should avoid diagnosing emotions and stay focused on the behavior.
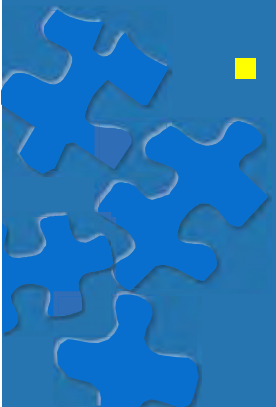
Threat Assessment Documentation

- Key content should be included on documentation form *and* your intervention plan

- Threat Assessment Documentation Form
  - Note important behavioral information on forms
  - Single prompts with space to write additional info
  - Include key indicators for evaluation
  - 11 key questions from US SS
  - Guidance for determination of risk

8. Reassess the Plan

- Provide ongoing monitoring
- Determine a review date for the plan
- Re-engage the process as needed

The student's *response* to the plan *is important!*

Are the interventions working??

9. Evaluate Your System Process

Sample questions for the team to ask:

- How did your system work?
  - Did the team work effectively?
  - Did the appropriate information get gathered and evaluated?
  - Did communication channels get used effectively?
  - Did re-entry and action planning get completed?
- Adjust as necessary

10. Re-engage the Process as Needed

- Build in periodic reviews of the student's progress

- Evaluate the response to the Action and Support Plan

- Continue monitoring and adjust plan as needed
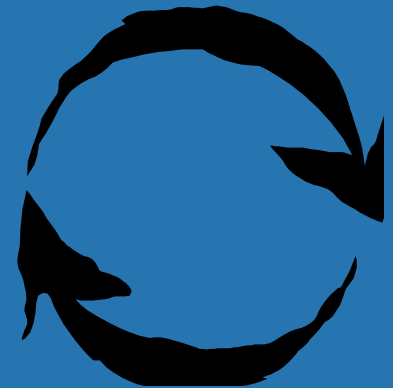
Threat Assessment Inquiry Steps

What Is *Your* Threshold?

# Other Considerations

How Much Time Do You Have?

Scenario

- Monday morning, the attendance secretary receives phone call from parent.
- Keeping son (Josh) home because of "concerns". He was hospitalized over weekend.
- Threatened to kill himself and was taken to hospital.
- Administrator is told of situation and calls parent to gather more information.
- Finds out Josh threatened to kill himself *AND*
 2 other boys who have been bullying him all year

Scenario

- Josh's mother is concerned and wants to know what the school is going to do
- Administrator tells parent more time is needed to inquire into the situation to ensure the safety of all boys
- Josh will return to school on Wednesday morning. *The administrator calls you…*
- What do you need to do?
- What information needs to be gathered before Wednesday?
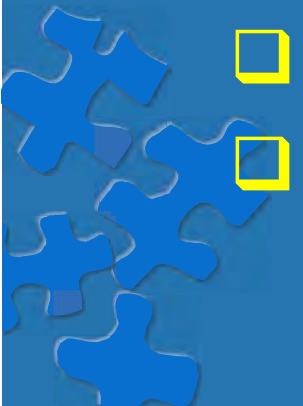
Use Your Team

Are your teams clearly established?
May be your established intervention teams
Does everyone know their role?

- Administrator
- Dean/Discipline
- School Psychologist
- Counselor
- Social Worker
- Nurse

- Special Education Representative
- School Resource Officer
- Teacher
- Other knowledgeable parties
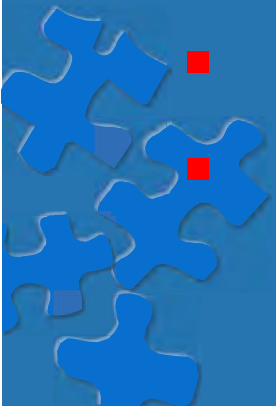
What Information Should be Sought?

- The facts that drew attention to the student, the situation, and the targets

- Information about the student

- Information about "attack related" behaviors

- Potential motives

- Potential targets

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

Use Multiple Sources of Information

- Collect behavioral data – what exactly happened, what exactly was said
- ✓ *Check VIRTUAL* data
- Past and present school records
- Law enforcement records
- Contact with involved community agencies

Use Multiple Sources of Information

- Search of student, locker, car, room or home

- Written, and artistic materials

- Interview the student

- Interview the parent

- Interview with staff, witnesses, and peers

- Interview with targeted individual(s)

School Information

- Past and present school records
- Review academic, behavioral & discipline records
- If student is new to school, call previous school
- Teacher interviews
- Classmate reports, concerns, interviews
- Who knows this student?
- ***Get facts.***
- Focus the discussion on ***"behaviors of concern".***
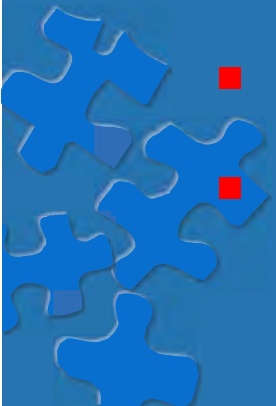
Care in Treatment of Students

- Allegations may be unfounded
- Provide supervision until concern is stabilized
- Is a search needed?
- Is the student in a mental health crisis?
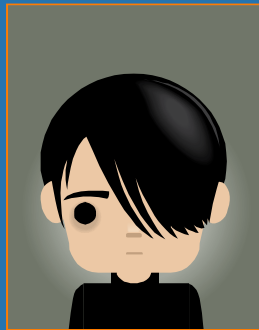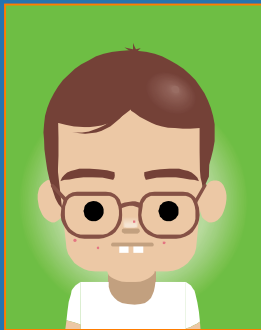
Interviewing the Student of Concern

- Purpose is to learn about student's thinking, behavior and possible motives

- Two people teaming can help with observations

- Safety should be maintained

- Review other available information beforehand

- Keep tone professional, neutral, non-confrontational

- *Ask open-ended questions*

Interviewing: Student of Concern

- Interview sends a message that behavior is of concern and is *noticed*

- Express your and others' concern

- Watch for non-verbal messages that do not match verbal: ask about them!

- Listen carefully

- Use what you have or know (i.e. writing, drawing)

- Ask directly about intention

    (what did they mean by…?)

- What about when the need for more psychological assessment is indicated?
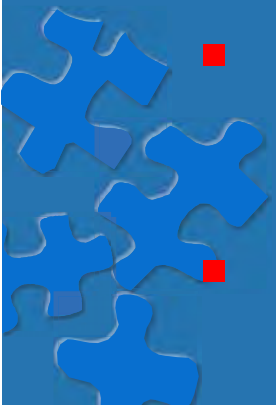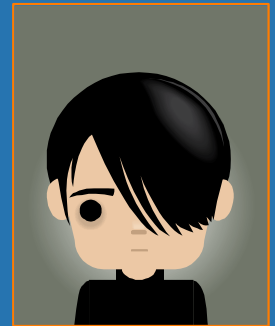
Threat Assessment Tools: Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence (Cornell & Sheras)

- Uses holistic approach
- *Provides interview guidance*
- Advocates teaming
- Uses US Secret Service recommendations
- Seven step decision tree
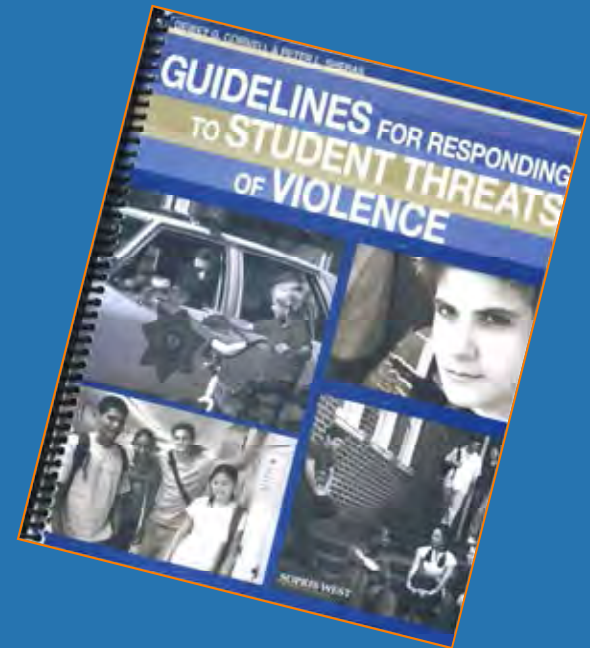
Cornell, D.G. & Sheras, P. L. (2006). Guidelines for responding to student threats of violence. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Assessing Written or Artistic Material

- Understand the **_context_** of the writing or drawing

- Is it outside the **_norm_** for that assignment, student's peers, age group, etc.?

- Think of written and artistic material as attempts to practice violence

- Express concern

Assessing Written or Artistic Material

- Keep questions open-ended

- Ask in detail about the material

- Look for themes

- Be persistent and specific with questions

- Assess the access to or knowledge of weapons

- Watch for non-verbal cues

- Monitor past & future materials

Parents as Partners

- Interview the parent without child

- Be aware of their fears, embarrassment

- Express concern for their child, as well as others

- *Purpose of this process is to **help their child and protect the safety of everyone***

- Seek their help in understanding the child's actions and interests

- Parents *may or may not*

- know about child's activities
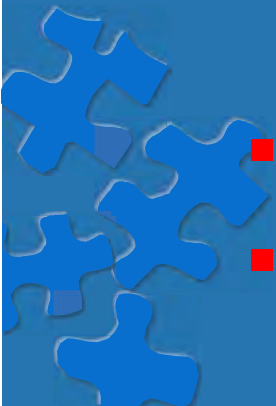
Parent Interviews

- Make early contact with parents & maintain contact
- Focus on student's behavior and communication
    - *Internet, cell phone, social networking and gaming sites*
    - *Will parents check?*
- Triangulate your data –Check what you have heard
- Explore students' interest, knowledge, *training* & access to firearms and other weapons

Asking Parents about Access to Firearms & Other Weapons

- The "firearms & weapons?" and "training?" questions

- Who is the best person to have this conversation with parents?

- To the best of their knowledge…
  - ✓ Are they aware?
  - ✓ Are they concerned?
  - ✓ Are they afraid?
  - ✓ Do they monitor child and activities?
  - ✓ Will they check?
  - ✓ Do you need to have someone check?

Use your law enforcement partners, as needed

Analyze the Available Information

- Is the student on a *current path toward violence?*

- Does the student need more of a suicide risk assessment?

- **USE the eleven key questions**
  (US Secret Service)

Using the 11 Key Questions
See Handout

1. What are the student's motives and goals?
2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?
3. Has the subject shown inappropriate interest in school attacks or attackers, weapons, incidents of mass violence?
4. Has the student engaged in attack related behaviors?
5. Does the student have the capacity to carry out the act?
6. Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation or despair?

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

Using the 11 Key Questions

6. Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?

7. Does the student see violence as an acceptable or desirable way to solve problems?

8. Is the student's conversation and "story" consistent with his or her actions?

9. Are other people concerned about the student's potential for violence?

10. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of violence?

Determining the Level of Concern

- Severity and scope of the threat
- Details and practice of the plan
- Ability and means to carry out the plan
- Engaging in attack-related or attack behaviors

- Other factors to consider:
  - warning signs, behavioral risk factors, *and protective or mitigating factors*

Critically Evaluate the Information

- **Consider warning signs and behavior**
    - The threat, target, plan, weapon, ability, history, motive, and practicing behavior.
- **Consider risk factors**
    - Special needs, past discipline, depression or suicide, legal concerns, family issues, unusual interests, victimization, coping style, etc.
- **Consider protective factors**
    - Seeks help, adults monitor, peer/adult support, self-monitoring or self-regulation abilities, previous interventions (trees) that were successful, etc.

(Adapted from Cherry Creek School District, 2008; Kanan & Lee)

Conclusions from the Inquiry

1. **Low Concern:**

   Continue <u>monitoring student</u> and consider the development of plan.

2. **Medium Concern:**
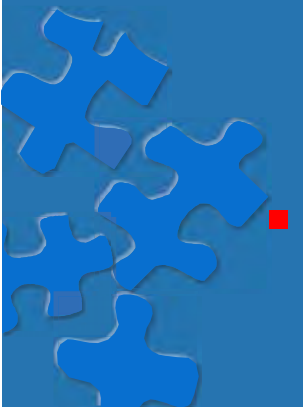
   Action & Support planning should be developed, set review & <u>monitor</u>

3. **High Concern:**

   Refer to law enforcement for investigation or to mental health for evaluation and hold

   - Includes planning of support services <u>& monitoring</u> in community and/or upon return to school system

Threat Intervention is a Continuum

Actions Should Be Equal To The Level Of Concern

Developing Action and Support Plans – See Handout

- What interventions might lessen the concern?

- Make a plan *and implement it*

- Timelines for review of progress can be short, if needed

- Should be developed if behavior indicates and for all moderate concern. Also upon re-entry of high concern

- May need updated information on student who has been in an alternative placement

(Reeves, Kanan, Plog, 2010)

Developing Action and Support Plans – See Handout

- Specify Consequences, Monitoring, Support

- Consider history of actions and consequences (don't repeat failures)

- Maximize resources of parents, community agencies, etc.

- "Behavior plans are only as strong as your weakest link" - Be <u>realistic</u> about your resources

- Start intense and then adjust based on progress

- **Build-in formal <u>follow-up</u> meetings**

(Reeves, Kanan, Plog, 2010)

Designing Action and Support Plans

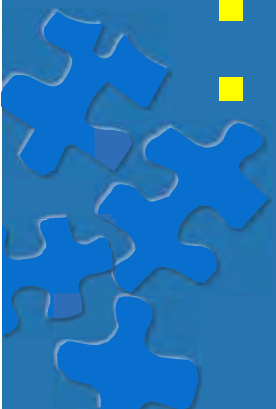- Interventions should be equal to the weight of concern

- Include steps for student and family

- Include a date for formal review of plan – follow up!

- Provide ongoing monitoring of student
  - Daily or weekly check-ins, etc.
  - Follow up on recommendations

- Designate a point of contact for plan, etc.

- Best practice suggestion for *ALL* schools
  - *Use of a district level review team*
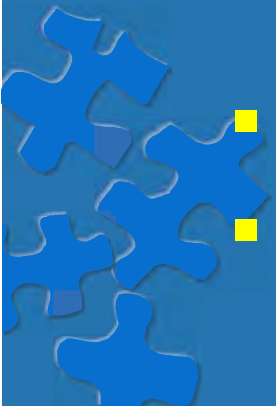
Train to Help Create Effective Intervention Plans

- Consider different types of intervention planning (countermeasures)

  - **T**rees
  - **T**reatment

  - **M**onitoring
  - **P**rotection

- More than just consequences
  - Skill development, build relationships, maximize strengths, etc.
- Maximize use of community resources
- *All students who engage in behavior that prompts a threat assessment should be monitored over time.*

Types of Trees

This is a powerful tree!

Questioning

Confronting

Consequences

Nicoletti, J. (2007, 2010). Managing threats in schools.
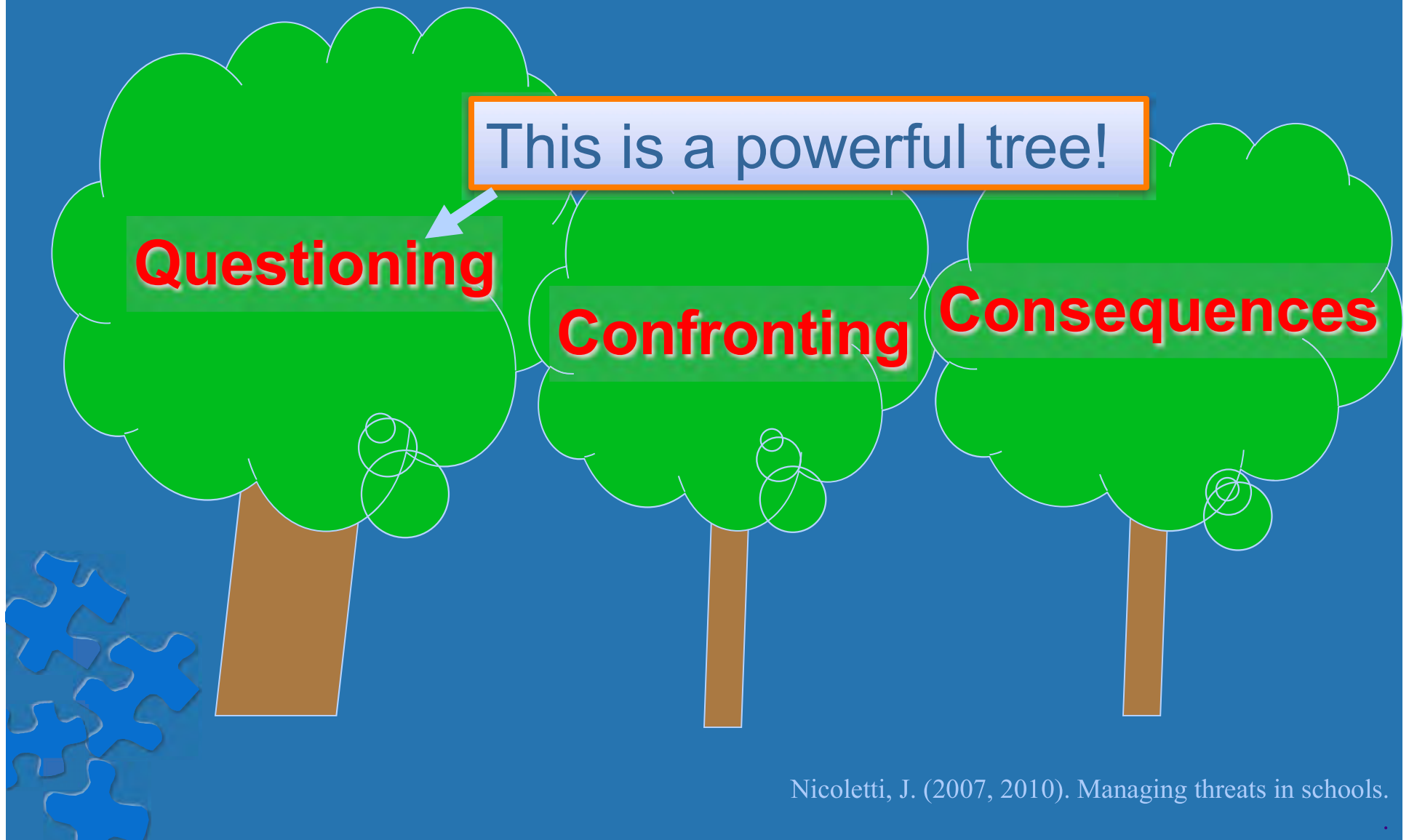
Balancing Trees of Discipline With Trees of Support & Skill Building

TREES OF DISCIPLINE and MONITORING

Student has dangerous behavior

School Provides Trees of Discipline and Support

TREES OF SUPPORT and SKILL BUILDING

Student returns to classroom or school with a PLAN that minimizes risk

(Kanan & Lee)
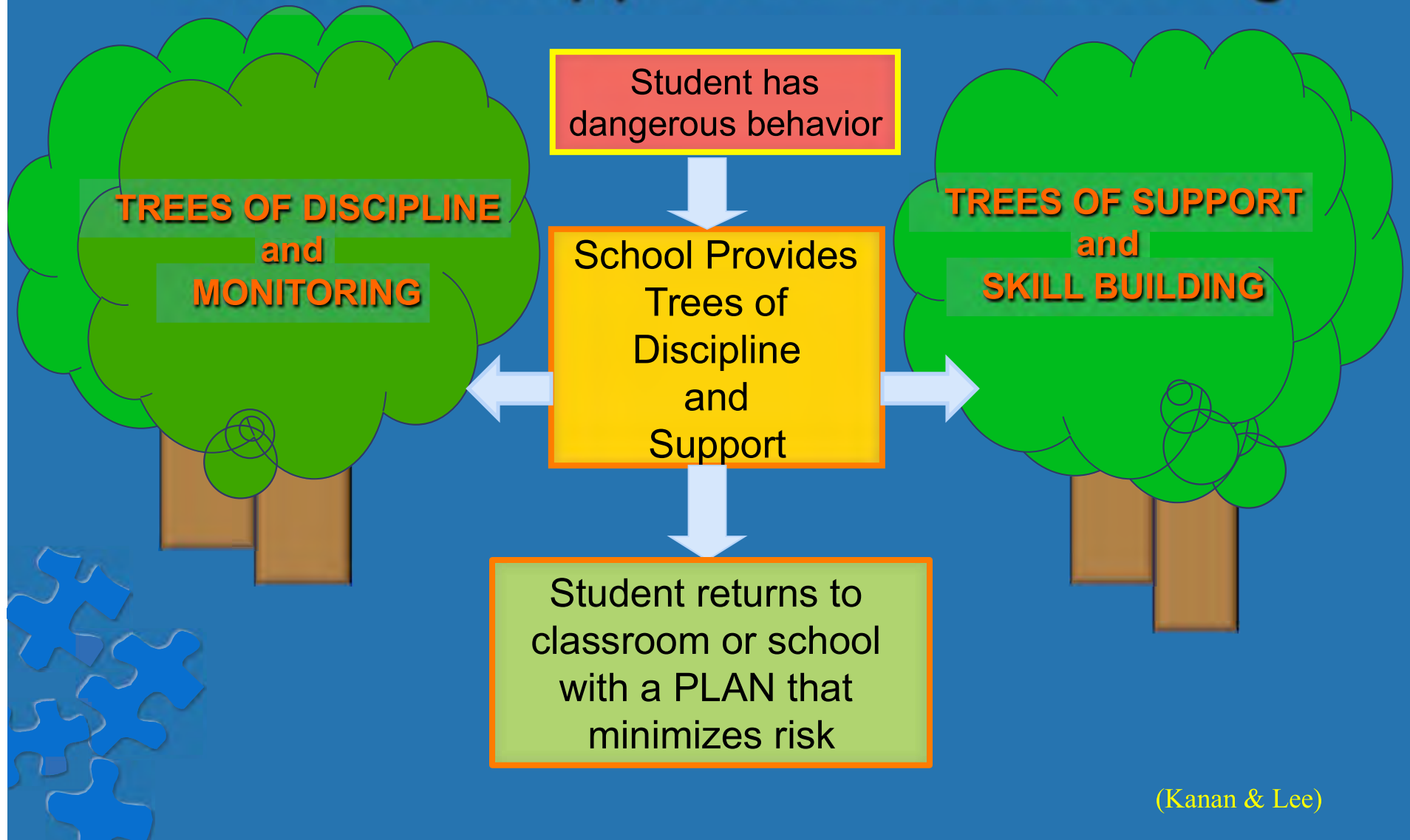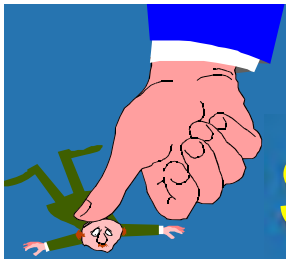
Sample of Discipline Measures

- ✓ Suspension
- ■ Detention
- ■ Apology letters
- ■ Behavior contracts
- ■ Removal of privileges
- ■ Use your school policies:
- ■ Willful disobedience, insubordination, and Expulsion Review

Process
- ■ Ticketing, charges, courts, probation
- ■ Law enforcement arrest and detainment
- ✓ Expulsion
- ■ Incarceration

(Kanan & Lee)

Sample of Monitoring Measures

- Specify check-in/check-out procedures

- Random checks when indicated

- Monitor attendance

- ✓ "No Contact" agreements and/or legal restraining orders

- Modify schedule as needed (reduce free time and unsupervised time)

- ✓ Regular contact between staff, parent(s), & others

- Ongoing agency, Department of Human Services, and/or Mental Health involvement

- Probation, Parole, Trackers, Ankle Monitors

- Review the student's response to monitoring

- Fade off monitoring as appropriate

(Kanan & Lee)
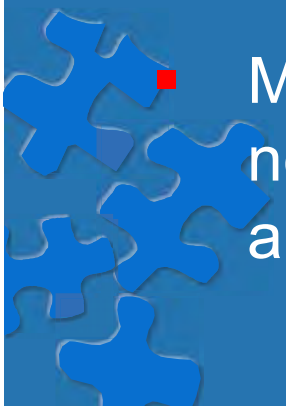
Sample of Skill Development Measures

- Participation in school or community social skills or counseling groups (Conflict Management, Anger Management, Social Skills, etc.)

- Provide needed academic support (Study Skills, Alternative Education)

- Special Education resources, as appropriate

- Consider change of placement in order to *access additional supports and resources*

- Complete an FBA leading to a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)

(Kanan & Lee)

Sample of Relationship Building Measures

- Identify supports/adults for the student in the school building

- Encourage participation in after-school activities/clubs

- Build school connectedness and engagement

- Involvement in community-based programs.

- Peer or Staff mentoring, as appropriate

- Mobilize the student's family and provide assistance with community resources

(Kanan & Lee)

Practical Considerations for Students with Disabilities

- Check conscious assumptions about students
- Context of behavior? (does student watch particular shows/ videos?)
- Is this typical behavior?
- Be proactive rather than reactive
- Each threat assessment should be individualized and comprehensive
- Consider how questions are worded when interviewing
- What is the function of the behavior? (i.e. attention, escape)
- Does student have means of follow through?
- Are there sensory issues?

Procedural Considerations for Students with Disabilities

- Is the behavior related to the disability?

- Is IEP written to address the behavior concerns? Is it current? It is being implemented with fidelity?

- Do all who have "need to know" have a good understanding of how to respond?

- Be proactive and have these students "on your radar"

- Does the threat assessment team include special education staff who are knowledgeable about the student *and trained* in threat assessment?

- Does your SRO have awareness about students with disabilities and how best to respond?

Clark, et al., 2016

Procedural Considerations for Students with Disabilities

- What do you do if in-school interventions are seen as ineffective?

- What if parents won't cooperate with a change of placement to a more restrictive setting?

- Definitions and state and federal law are important: i.e. weapons, seriously bodily injury, or threat

Farrington, 2016

Real Life Example: Elementary Case

Threatens to cut teacher's brake line

Retracts statement, parents minimize

Parent makes normative statement about Russia and weapons

Psychologist and and Behavior Consultant question student

School explores community placement

District SPED coordinator calls police, finds no weapons at home

Student placed in day treatment facility

(Kanan & Lee)

The Escalation of "Brian"

No significant school history

Classroom writing → Evaluated / Call to parents / Warning / Monitored

Unauthorized Internet use → Met with parents / Computer access restricted
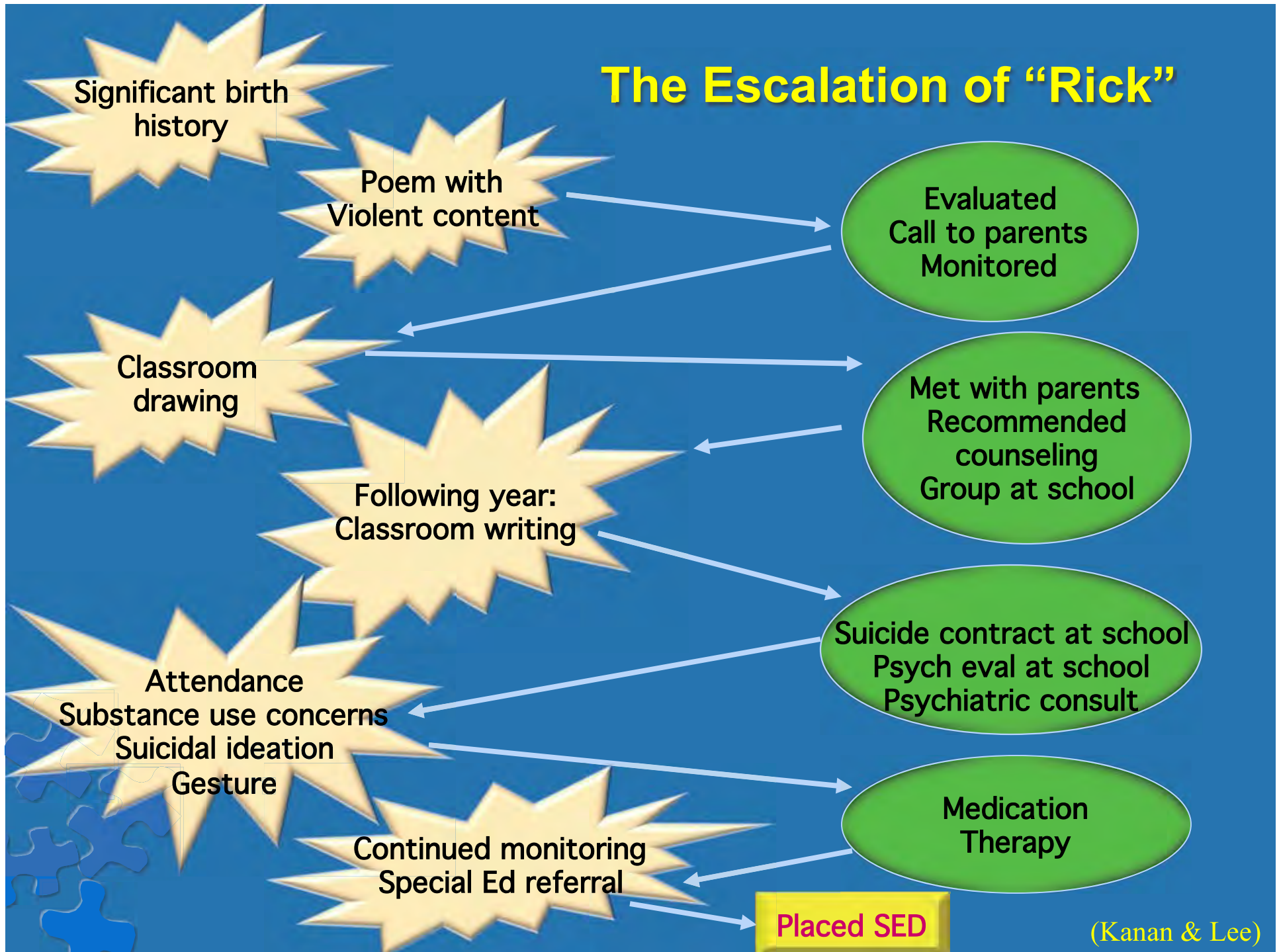
Faked seizure → Fire Dept.called / Charged with false report / Paid fine

Academic concerns / Went to smaller / Alternative setting → No significant Behavior problems

(Kanan & Lee)

The Escalation of "Rick"

Significant birth history

Poem with Violent content → Evaluated Call to parents Monitored

Classroom drawing → Met with parents Recommended counseling Group at school

Following year: Classroom writing → Suicide contract at school Psych eval at school Psychiatric consult

Attendance Substance use concerns Suicidal ideation Gesture → Medication Therapy

Continued monitoring Special Ed referral → Placed SED

(Kanan & Lee)

Action and Support Plan for "Jeff"

- Consequences:
  - Suspension from school, ticketed, court
- Monitoring:
  - Check-in with Dean & school psych, phone contact with mother & therapist, weapons safety contract, video & computer restrictions
- Skill Building:
  - Regular sessions with school psych & community therapist
- Relationship Building:
 - Encouraged martial arts pursuits & working part-time

Workshop Scenario: Developing an Action and Support Plan

- ❑ The hospital determined that Josh was ***not*** suicidal
- ❑ There had been a family argument between Josh and stepdad that precipitated the comments about suicide
- ❑ Josh had <u>not</u> told anyone about the bullying until the hospital interview
- ❑ He still remains very angry at the other boys
- ❑ Does Josh pose a threat? What else would you want to know?
- ❑ What would you include in the action and support plan?

What Threat Assessments CAN Provide

- A *prevention* tool to reduce risk
- Fact and <u>behavior based assessment</u>
- A teaming process to obtain relevant information
- Descriptive information
- Common language for school personnel
- Documentation of concern – a look over time
- An opportunity for intervention planning and monitoring of progress
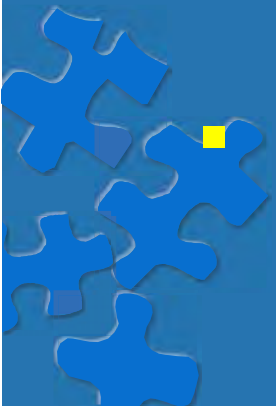
The Limitations of Threat Assessments

- *Not a substitute for a suicide assessment – ask directly about suicidal/homicidal ideation*

- *Not a prediction of future behavior*

- **You MUST monitor future behavior!**

Final Thoughts

Effective school safety:

- starts with prevention, awareness of concerns & timely reporting,

- integrates physical safety and security and psychological safety,

- provides for students' mental health, early detection and early and effective intervention, and

- engages schools, families, law enforcement, community treatment providers & other community agencies as partners.

It is ALL of our efforts that will increase the likelihood of success in preventing school violence

and keep our schools and communities safe.

Linda M. Kanan, Ph.D.
School Psychologist
School Safety and Education Consultant
lmkanan@comcast.net

Additional Helpful Websites:
Colorado School Safety Resource Center
https://www.colorado.gov/cssrc

US Department of Education, Readiness &
Emergency Management for Schools
http://rems.ed.gov/default.aspx

Sandy Hook Promise
http://www.sandyhookpromise.org