

The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment and Management Teams

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SUMMARY

Threat Assessment and Management Team

- Multidisciplinary Team
- Responsible for the careful and contextual identification and evaluation of behaviors that:
 - Raise concern
 - May precede violent activity on campus
 - Take appropriate precautionary steps to prevent targeted violence from occurring
 - Help ensure people in need (faculty, staff or student) are directed to appropriate support mechanisms

Tasks

- Gather pieces of information and assemble them into a larger picture
- What are they saying?
- What are they doing?
- Context of each
- Break down silos

Recent media attention to campus murder, example: Virginia Tech

Any approach that deals only with homicidal violence will be found lacking as the community seeks to find and maintain a sense of safety and security

“Red Flags”

Threatening statements

Intimidating comments or behaviors

Problematic but not well documented or researched

Patterns of Bullying

Mental illness can include behaviors that may be harmful to individuals and/or disruptive to the campus community

- Suicide ideation or attempts

- Self-injurious behavior
- Inappropriate aggression
- Alcohol and other drug abuse

2007 study of counseling center directors: 49% of clients had severe mental health issues including depression, anxiety and panic attacks. Only 20% of these could not maintain their enrollment.

Problem: Threat Assessment Profiling

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Preventing violence | Looks at similarities to shooter |
| Fact-based | Focuses on predicting violence |
| Inductive | Characteristics rather than behaviors |
| | Trait based |

Focusing solely on predication, profiling offers no guidance with respect to intervention or threat reduction

Secret Service: Columbine review and Virginia Tech reports both indicated that profiling does not work.

What would this look like?

- Male
- 20-45
- White

Typical mission: Assess whether individuals pose a threat to themselves or others and intervenes when necessary and more generally provide assistance to those in need

Sample Mission Statement pg. 26

The threat assessment and management team is committed to improving community safety. Through a **proactive, collaborative, coordinated, objective** and **thoughtful** approach to the prevention, identification, assessment, intervention and management of situations that pose, or may reasonably pose a threat to the safety and well-being of the campus community.

Guiding Principles of Threat Assessment and Management

Principle 1: Targeted violence can often be prevented

1. Targeted violence is rarely spontaneous
2. Perp usually engages in a frequently observable pattern of thought and behavior prior to becoming violent
 - a. Typical stages

- i. Ideation—come up with idea to do harm
- ii. Planning—develop a plan to carry out that harm
- iii. Preparation—develop the capacity to carry out the plan
- iv. Implementation—carry out the attack

Our goal is to stop the forward progression down that pathway.

Principle 2: Violence is a dynamic process

Not about trying to find out if someone is a violent person—the team tries to determine the circumstances or situation in which the person might pose a threat to themselves or others

- What factors in a person’s life might change (> or <) likelihood of violence
- Teams must continually monitor and re-evaluate the situation
- We must determine impact of the interventions use

Principle 3: Targeted violence is a function of several factors

Violence arises from an intersection of several factors

- The individual of concern
- Their situation—influences on the individual’s behavior
- Target of the individual’s animosity or grievances

Triggering condition: Target

Individual

Setting

Principle 4: Corroboration is critical

- Corroborating information through multiple sources is essential
- Keep a skeptical mindset—weigh credibility of sources legitimate threat or just a vocal frustration
- Based on facts and behaviors—not assumptions

Principle 5: Threat Assessment is about behavior, not profiles

- There is no single “type” of person who perpetrates targeted violence
- The focus in threat assessment is on what this individual in this particular context has done (or is doing) that causes concern.

Principle 6: Cooperating Systems are critical

Resources:

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Coordination among various departments
- Using different systems throughout campus as well as outside resources provide more eyes and ears on the process of assessment and management
- Relationships are critical
- Shared mission will help achieve desired safety goals.

Principle 7: Does the person pose a threat?

- Did he/she make a threat or do they really pose a threat?
- Take all threats seriously

Principle 8: Keep victims in mind

- Victims more interested in threat management than threat assessment

Principle 9: Early identification and intervention helps everyone

- Targeted violence is frequently the end result of an identifiable pattern of thought and behavior
- Need to learn about persons who have raised concern as early as possible
- Volatile situations are like poured concrete: it is harder to work with the longer it sets
- Early identification allows for a broader range of interventions options

Principle 10: Multiple reporting mechanisms enhance early identification

- Simple early access to reporting, consultation and intervention resources
- Guidance on what to report
- Controversy about anonymous tips—should the group accept anonymous tips that may not allow for any follow up?

Principle 11: Multifaceted resources can provide effective intervention

- Utilize multiples, sustained and coordinated interventions for maximum effectiveness

Principle 12: Safety is a primary focus

- Interventions—counseling supports, confrontation, termination, arrest, hospitalization, all tools to achieve safety
- Techniques used to stop violence may be someone's triggering event!!

Section 3: Team Composition

- Size
- Departments represented:
 - Academic affairs
 - Human resources (for faculty and staff)
 - Media relations
 - Police
 - Residential life
 - Student affairs
 - Mental health
 - Legal counsel
 - Graduate and professional schools
 - Specialty member

Quality of team members

- Commitment to safety
- To fair, objective, reasonable and timely efforts
- Sensitivity/diversity
- Creative problem solving
- Share information legally
- Ability to gather, organize and interpret complex info from multiple sources
- Knowledge of threat assessment
- Communication skills
- Consultation skills
- Ability to document, prepare, update, maintain confidential info
- Knowledge of state and federal laws
- Recognize limits of training
- Ability to handle crisis communication
- Know of community resources and mental health professionals
- Ability to make critical decisions

The Threat Assessment and Management Process

1. Identify a student, faculty or staff member who has engaged in threatening behaviors or done something that raised serious concern about their well-being, stability or potential for violence or suicide
 - a. Encouraging reporting--identification depends in large part upon the willingness and ability of the campus to communicate with the Behavioral Consultation Team (BCT).
 - b. Ebb and flow--post Virginia Tech

- c. Multiple ways to report info- “if you see something, say something”
 - d. Tell parents about BCT so they can report their own kids if needed
 - e. Campus outreach
 - i. Posters
 - ii. Meetings- faculty/deans
 - iii. Website
 - iv. RA’s
2. Conduct an initial screening
- a. Is there imminent danger or emergency situation?
 - b. Set priority level: Extreme, high, medium, low
 - c. Contain the person
 - d. Effect an arrest
 - e. Psych evaluation
 - f. Review previous contacts made through BCT-PING system
 - i. Residential Life
 - ii. Police
 - iii. Student conduct
 - iv. Youtube.com
 - v. Technorati.com
 - vi. Suicidal thoughts and plans
 - vii. Plans for violence
 - viii. Behaviors that cause concern (high risk)
 - ix. Access to weapons
 - x. Any behavior disruptive to campus environment
3. Conduct a full inquiry
- a. Gather information
 - i. Faculty/ staff (Academic Affairs)
 - ii. Student conduct
 - iii. Faculty grievance boards
 - iv. Staff grievance review committee
 - v. Diversity office
 - vi. University legal counsel
 - vii. Campus police
 - viii. Residential Life (judicial system)
 - ix. Greek Life
 - x. Local law enforcement through campus police or personal contact
 - xi. Previous school employers
 - xii. Family member
 - xiii. Email/internet info
 - xiv. Health center
 - xv. Person of concern
4. Answer key inquiry questions. Can we pull together a comprehensive picture of the student?
- a. Person’s motive(s) or goal(s)
 - i. Motivation
 - ii. Does situation that led to statements still exist?
 - iii. Grievance or grudge
 - iv. What efforts have been used to resolve problem?
 - v. Has person mentioned justification for violence?

- b. Communication to the University communicating ideas or intent to attack?
 - c. Inappropriate interest in:
 - i. Workplace or school violence
 - ii. Weapons
 - iii. Incidents of mass violence (mass murders)
 - iv. Obsessive pursuit, stalking or monitoring others
 - d. Has person engaged in attack related behaviors? Idea of harm to real harm.
 - i. Develop a plan
 - ii. Practice with weapons
 - iii. Surveillance of sites
 - iv. Stalking targets
 - v. Test access to potential targets
 - vi. Rehearsing attacks
 - e. Does the person have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?
 - f. Person experiencing hopelessness, separation or despair
 - g. Does person have a trusted relationship with at least one responsible person? (Friend, lover, roomie, faculty member or advisor)
 - h. Does the person see violence as an acceptable, desirable or only way to solve problem?
 - i. Is the person's conversation and "story" consistent with actions?
 - j. Are other people concerned about person's potential for violence?
 - k. What circumstance might affect the likelihood of violence? What would be > or <
 - l. Where does the subject exist along the pathway to violence?
 - i. Idea
 - ii. Plan
 - iii. Steps toward implementing
 - iv. Capacity or means to carry out plan
5. Make the assessment
 6. Develop and implement a plan to manage and/or monitor the person
 7. Monitor the plan
 8. Refer and follow up as appropriate