



School Threat Assessment: Building a Program and Process

Marisa R. Randazzo, Ph.D.
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SESSION AGENDA

- Targeted School Shootings & Prevention
- What is School Threat Assessment?
- Operating a School Threat Assessment Program
- School Threat Assessment Process
- The Art of Case Management
- Other Things We Can Do
- Summary / Q&A



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Targeted School Shootings and Prevention



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S *SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE*

Background:

- Largest federal study of school shootings in the US.
- Collaboration between US Secret Service and US Department of Education.
- 37 incidents, 41 attackers
- Focus was on operational information – what could be detectable and usable

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S *MAJOR FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS*

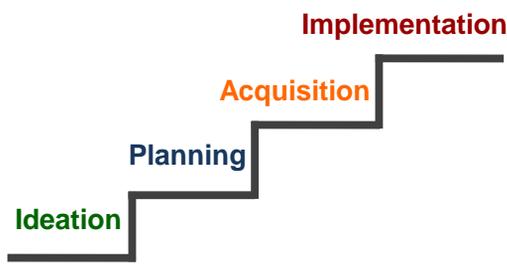
1. School-based attacks are rarely sudden, impulsive acts.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S.* (2002).



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S *PATHWAY TO VIOLENCE*



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 MAJOR FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

2. Prior to the attacks, others usually knew of attacker's idea/plan.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S.* (2002).



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 MAJOR FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

3. Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to the attack.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S.* (2002).



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 MAJOR FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

4. There is no accurate or useful profile of the "school shooter."

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S.* (2002).



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 MAJOR FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

5. Most attackers had seriously concerned others in their lives prior to the attack.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S.* (2002).



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 MAJOR FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

6. Most attackers had significant difficulties with losses or failures. Most were suicidal.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S.* (2002).



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 MAJOR FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

7. Many felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S.* (2002).



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MAJOR FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

8. Most attackers had access to weapons – and has used weapons -- prior to the attack.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S.* (2002).



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MAJOR FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

9. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S.* (2002).



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MAJOR FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

10. Despite prompt law enforcement response, most incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

Most were very brief in duration.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of Targeted School Violence in the U.S.* (2002).



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 **IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION**

- Many school attacks can be prevented.
- Information about a student’s ideas and plans for violence can be observed or discovered before harm can occur.
- But information available is likely to be scattered and fragmented.
- Key is to act quickly upon an initial report of concern, gather other pieces of the puzzle, then assemble to see what picture emerges.

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 **IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION**

- Assessment involves asking: Is this student on a pathway toward violence?
- Using a team can be particularly effective for gathering and evaluating information, and intervening if necessary.
- Threat assessment and case management is not an adversarial process. Engagement with a person of concern can be critical to preventing violence or harm.

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**What is
School Threat Assessment?**

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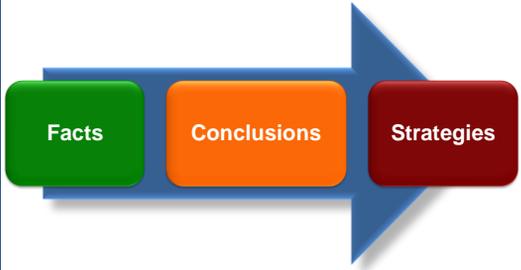
WHAT IS SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT?

A systematic process that is designed to:

- 1 • Identify students of concern
- 2 • Gather information/investigate
- 3 • Assess student and situation
- 4 • Manage the student / situation

THREAT ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Threat assessment is fact-based and deductive:



Operating a School / District Threat Assessment Program

Operating a School / District Threat Assessment Program

THREAT ASSESSMENT PROGRAM COMPONENTS

- Threat Assessment Team
 - School-based team and/or
 - District-level team
- Administration support
- Basic procedures and necessary policies
- Threat assessment training
- Legal counsel input on information-sharing
- Mental health resources (school, community)

THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM

- Team composition (school level or district level):
- Multi-disciplinary (within/outside school)
 - Include SRO / Local law enforcement
 - Include mental health consultant / expertise
 - Ad hoc members when needed
 - Link with other organizations with student contact

- Multi-disciplinary composition enhances team's ability to:
- Identify
 - Gather
 - Assess
 - Manage

ADDITIONAL COMPONENTS

- Table-top exercises
- Database or other record-keeping
- Reporting procedures/mechanisms
- General awareness training
- Communications with parents and community
- Community partnerships



School Threat Assessment Process



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SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Steps in the School Threat Assessment Process:

1. Learn about a student of possible concern.
2. Gather information about the student and his/her situation.
3. Use information to answer 11 Key Questions.
4. Make evaluation / assessment
5. Develop and implement case management plan



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1. LEARN ABOUT A STUDENT OF CONCERN

May happen through a variety of means:

- Teacher
- Anonymous tip line
- Student
- Parent
- Law enforcement
- Where do you get the most referrals? The least?
- Identify areas where additional liaison may be needed
 - After-school programs
 - Weekend sports teams
 - Parents
 - Employers



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2. GATHER INFORMATION

Seek out information from multiple sources about the student and his/her situation:

Who might have information?

- Teachers / Administrators
- School Staff
- Friends / Classmates
- Coach / Teammates
- Parents
- Social media sites / Internet
- Local law enforcement
- After-school / weekend programs
- Community-level entities
- Others?



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2. GATHER INFORMATION

- Recognize that violence is a dynamic process. It stems from interaction between the student, their situation, and their setting.
- Avoid reliance on single factors.
- Utilize multiple collateral data sources
 - Credible
 - First-hand knowledge
 - Evaluate and minimize impact of bias
- Anticipate and assess impact of the investigative process on the student and his/her situation.



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3. ANSWER ELEVEN KEY QUESTIONS

1. What are the student's motive(s) and goals? / What first brought him/her to someone's attention?
2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?
3. Has the student shown any inappropriate interest in school attacks/attackers, weapons, incidents of mass violence?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).



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3. ANSWER ELEVEN KEY QUESTIONS

4. Has the student engaged in attack-related behaviors?
5. Does the student have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?
6. Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation, and/or despair?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).

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3. ANSWER ELEVEN KEY QUESTIONS

7. Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?
8. Does the student see violence as an acceptable, desirable – or the only – way to solve a problem?
9. Are the student’s conversation and “story” consistent with his or her actions?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).

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3. ANSWER ELEVEN KEY QUESTIONS

10. Are other people concerned about the student’s potential for violence?
11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of an attack?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).

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4. MAKE EVALUATION / ASSESSMENT

Answer two assessment questions:

1. Does the student pose a threat of harm, whether to himself, to others, or both? That is, does the student's behavior suggest that he or she is on a pathway toward harm?
 - *If YES, then develop and implement a case management plan.*
 - *If NO, proceed to second question:*

2. Does the student otherwise show a need for help or intervention, such a mental health care?

5. DEVELOP A CASE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Develop an individualized plan based on information gathered in the investigation and other facts known about the student.

- **Case management is more art than science.**
- **Plan must be fact-based and student-specific.**
- **Engagement is essential, even when dealing with someone who is very angry.**
- **Distancing makes monitoring and intervention more difficult.**
- **Personalities involved matter.**

CASE MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

Try to involve someone whom the student trusts:

- Team member
- Teacher
- Academic advisor
- School counselor
- School nurse
- Parent / family member
- Coach
- Outside counselor
- Pastor
- Other



CASE MANAGEMENT

A case management plan can include any of the following, and others:

- Outpatient counseling/mental health care.
- Emergency psychiatric evaluation
- Mentoring relationship
- Academic accommodations
- Suspension/expulsion
- Alternative schooling/home schooling
- Involvement in extra-curricular activities
- Social skills training
- Behavioral contract
- Parental involvement
- Law enforcement involvement
- Diversion programs
- Management by walking around/alliance
- Others?



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Other Things We Can Do



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ENCOURAGE REPORTING OF CONCERNS

- Bystanders can play a critical role in prevention
- Role of threat assessment team is not punitive
- Goals are to maintain safety and connect person with necessary help
- Earlier reporting allows greater range of options
- Reporting allows something to be done

"If you see something, say something."

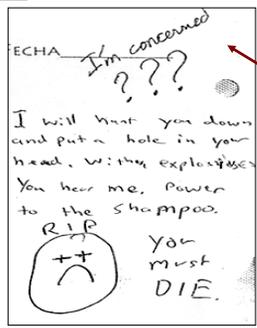
Source: NYC Metropolitan Transportation Authority



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NEED FOR TIMELY REPORTING



From Kip Kinkel's Spanish homework.
Note comment by teacher at top.

WHERE TO REPORT?



ENHANCING SCHOOL CLIMATE

- Assess and enhance school climate:**
- Surveys for faculty, staff, students, parents, others
 - Data-driven enhancements
 - Student input for solutions and implementation
- Connection with all students:**
- Powerful protective factor
 - Low-cost or no-cost options



Summary / Q&A



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SUMMARY

- Prevention is possible.
- Threat assessment teams can identify and help address a broad array of problematic behavior.
- A multi-disciplinary team, liaison relationships, and a positive climate can facilitate the overall process.
- Periodic training and/or process review are critical to effective threat assessment.
- Consult, consult, consult!



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CONTACT INFORMATION:

Marisa R. Randazzo, Ph.D.
 SIGMA Threat Management Associates
 703-647-7419
 MRandazzo@SigmaTMA.com



Report and Guide available for download at: www.SigmaTMA.com



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