

***School Threat Assessment to Help
Distressed Students and Prevent Violence***

World Anti-Bullying Forum
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Virginia Research Team



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Dewey G. Cornell, Ph. D.

- Holds the Virgil Ward Chair as Professor of Education in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Virginia.
- Director of the UVA Youth Violence Project

Dr. Cornell became interested in the prevention of youth violence and bullying based on his experiences as a forensic clinical psychologist evaluating and treating violent offenders in the 1980s. He led the development of threat assessment guidelines for schools in 2001. Dr. Cornell discloses that he has a financial interest in the CSTAG manual and training programs.

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Topics

1. Bullying case example
2. School threat assessment
3. CSTAG research evidence



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**Middle School
Bullying**

- Gossip column in school newspaper says he and his best friend John have “feelings for one another”
- Called “gay boy”
- Shoved, spit upon
- Pants pulled down


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High School Bullying

- Teasing continues in high school, food taken at lunch, lab work ruined in class
- Band teacher permits further harassment as traditional “initiation”
- Gym teacher makes him play basketball with the girls


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Deterioration under Stress of Bullying

- He becomes depressed and suicidal, cuts himself
- Becomes paranoid, hears voices taunting him and urging him to take revenge
- Joins an outcast group known as “the freaks” who protected him and wanted to take revenge on the bullies.


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School shooting from "The Basketball Diaries"

Warning: Violent Content


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West Paducah, Ky. DEC. 1, 1997


Three girls were killed when MICHAEL CARNEAL, 14, opened fire on a prayer meeting that had assembled in school just before the start of class. He had warned a classmate that “something big” would happen. When a friend pushed him to a wall to stop the rampage, Carneal said, “Kill me, please. I can’t believe I did that.” He faces trial as an adult

■ A .22-cal. Ruger pistol was used



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Three students killed, 5 wounded in shooting



McCracken police: Boy, 14, opened fire on prayer circle

By JAMES NAUGHTON
The Courier-Journal

DEATH. Ky. — A freshman struffed into the lobby of Heath High School yesterday morning, calmly pulled a pistol from his backpack and opened fire as a student prayer circle was disbanding, police and witnesses said.

In less than two minutes, eight students had been shot — three fatally.

The 14-year-old shooting suspect, who took the time to get to rest room before opening fire, had worked that morning as a janitor in the school, police said. The high school, a private school, didn't take the boy seriously and did not report the rumors to school of local news.

After the shooting, an ambulance from the north had brought four more girls with him and more than 400 rounds of ammunition.

Michael Carneal was arrested after the shooting at



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How can we prevent school shootings?

- Anti-bullying interventions
- Mental health services
- School threat assessment

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Shootings are averted when students report threats.

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Threat assessment is a violence prevention strategy.

- 1. Identification:** friends, family members, or others seek help when concerned about someone in distress/threatening violence.
- 2. Evaluation:** Threat assessment team evaluates the seriousness of the threat.
- 3. Intervention:** The team initiates assistance to address the underlying problem, conflict or need. In the most serious cases, protective action is taken.

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Accurate Threat Assessment Avoids 2 Errors ...

1. Over-reaction

School Suspends Second Grader for Eating His Pop-Tart Into the Shape of a Gun



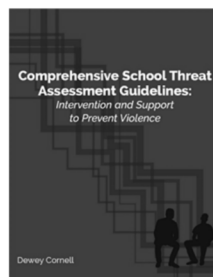
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Accurate Threat Assessment Avoids 2 Errors ...

2. Under-Reaction



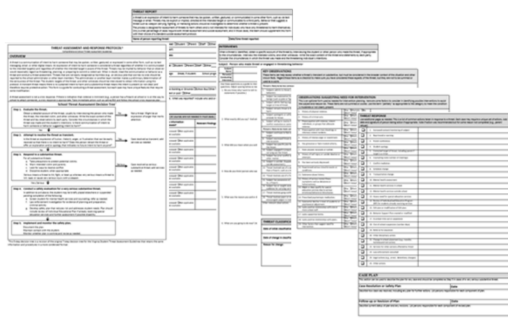
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- Developed 2001 at University of Virginia
- School-based teams gather information
- Follow decision tree to determine whether threat is transient or substantive
- Take protective action if substantive
- Attempt to resolve the problem underlying the threat

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Forms Freely Available <https://www.schoolta.com/>



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Continuum of Threats

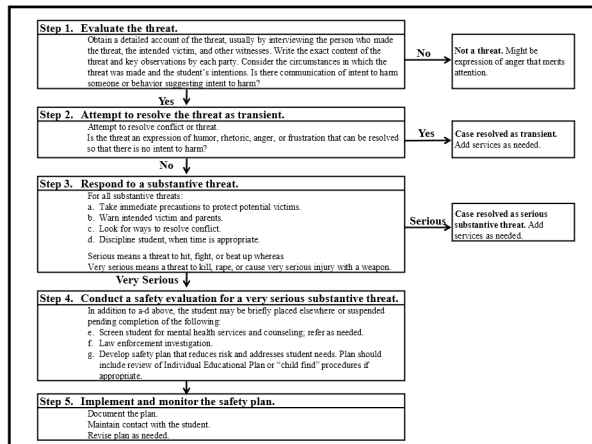


- Warning of impending violence
- Attempts to intimidate or frighten
- Thrill of causing a disruption
- Attention-seeking, boasting
- Fleeting expressions of anger
- Jokes
- Figures of speech

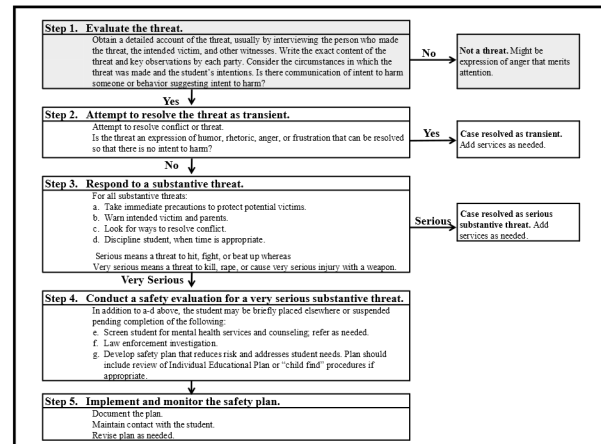
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School Threat Assessment to Help Distressed Students and Prevent Violence

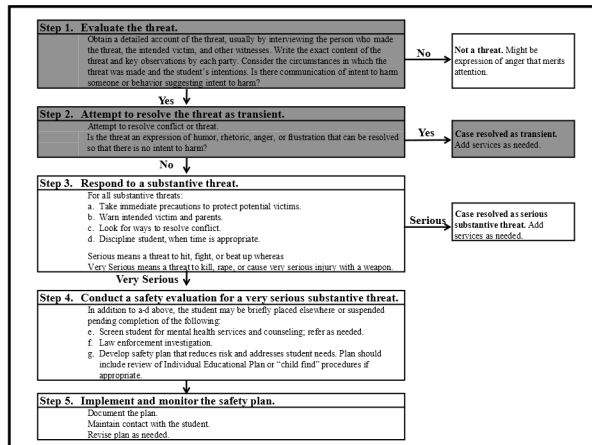
Keynote for World Anti-Bullying Forum on 1 Nov 2021



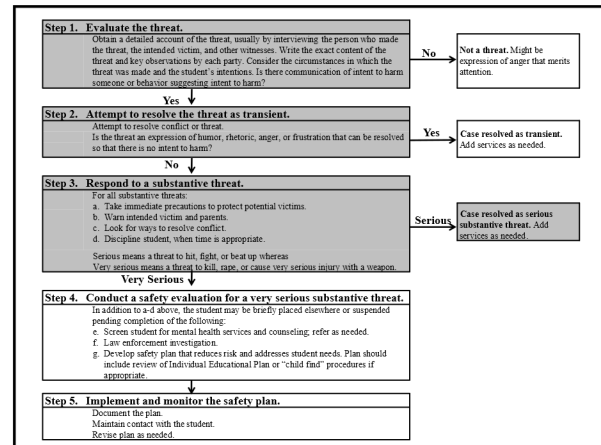
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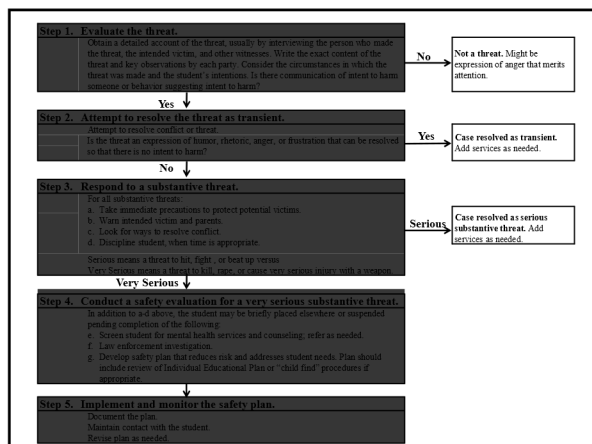
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Research on Threat Assessment

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Research on Threat Assessment

- 1. Field-test**
What happens when you try the model?
- 2. Controlled studies**
Cross-sectional, retrospective study:
How do schools using the model compare to other schools?
Pre-post study:
How do schools change after adopting the model?
Randomized controlled trial:
What happens to students in schools randomly chosen to use the model?
- 3. Large-scale implementation**
What happens when the whole state adopts the model?

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Research on Threat Assessment

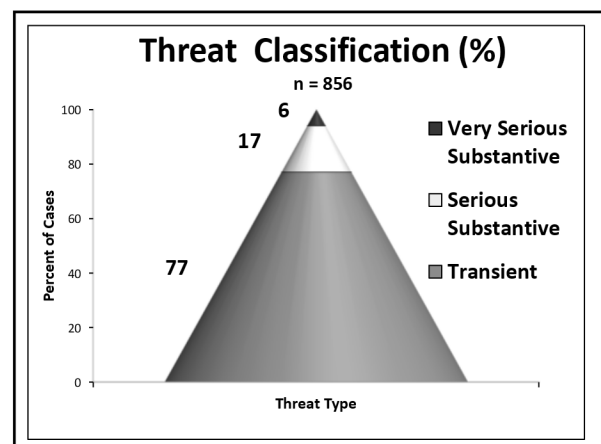
1. 99% of threats not carried out.
2. Only 1% expelled, 1% arrested.
3. Suspension rates decreased.
4. Counseling used more often.
5. Less bullying!

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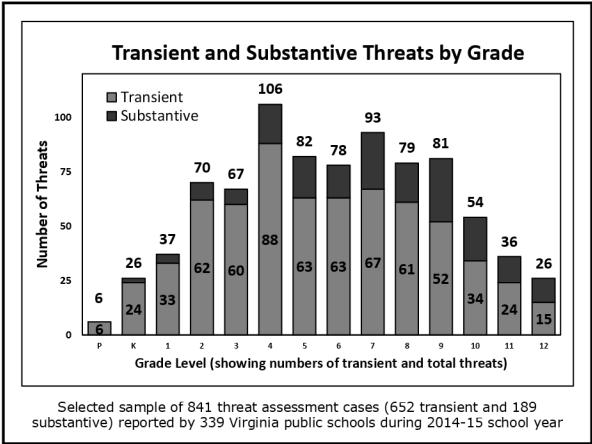
Routine Practice Study

- Everyday practice results
- 339 Virginia schools
- 884 threat cases
- Descriptive results

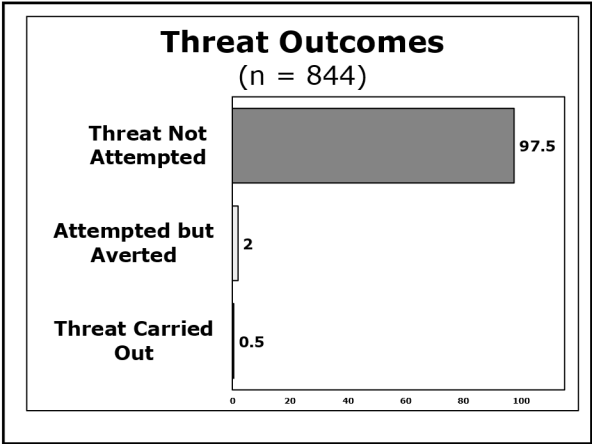
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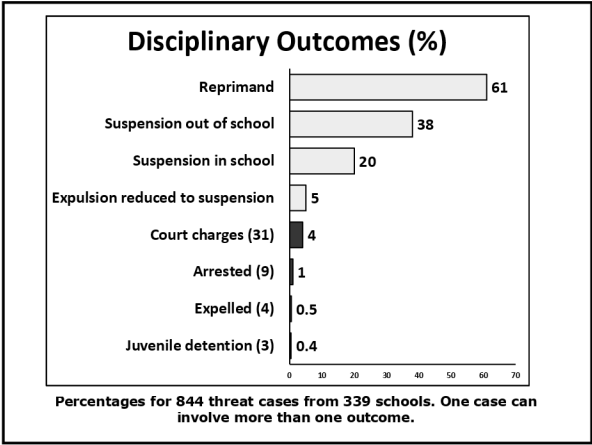
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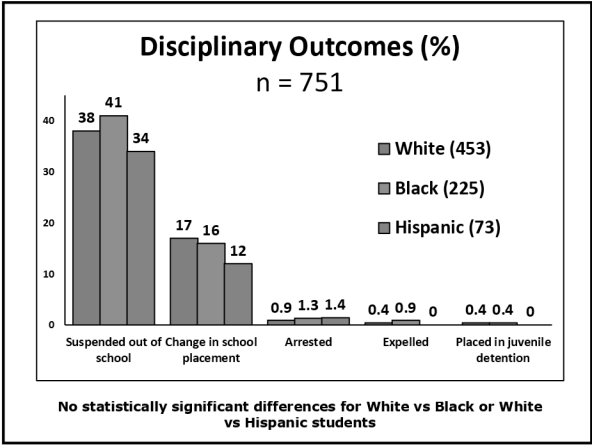
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Conclusions

1. **Bullying is an ongoing problem linked to school shootings.**

2. **School threat assessment can help schools resolve threats without over-reacting or under-reacting.**



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