Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

Developed by Dewey Cornell, Ph.D. and Colleagues School of Education and Human Development, University of Virginia

Training provided by School Threat Assessment Consultants, LLC www.schoolta.com



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Dr. Cornell became interested in the prevention of youth violence 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.

Faculty are required to declare any personal or professional financial relationship with a commercial entity producing healthcare goods and/or services. Dr. Cornell discloses that he has a financial interest in the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG.)

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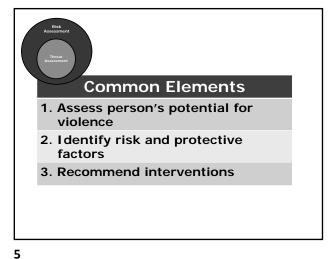
Overview

- 1. How does threat assessment differ from risk assessment?
- 2. How can we conduct a student threat assessment?
- 3. What does research tell us about student threat assessment?

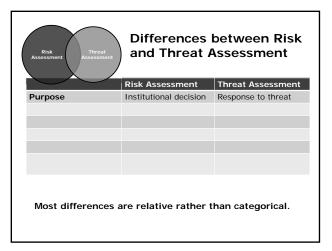
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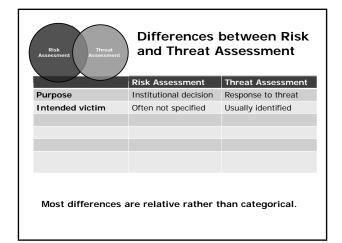


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Risk Assessment Assessment Assessment





Differences between Risk and Threat Assessment		
	Risk Assessment	Threat Assessment
Purpose	Institutional decision	Response to threat
Intended victim	Often not specified	Usually identified
Timeframe	Often open-ended	Relatively short
Most differences are relative rather than categorical.		

Differences between Risk and Threat Assessment

Risk Assessment

Risk Assessment

Purpose
Institutional decision
Intended victim
Often not specified
Timeframe
Often open-ended
Primary Goal

Accurate prediction

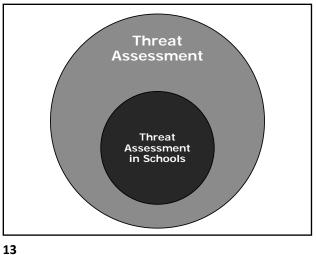
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Risk Assessment Assessment and Threat Assessment		
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Social ecology	Often not considered	Goal to improve climate



Applications of Threat Assessment

Law Enforcement	Schools
Assassins	
Stalkers	
Terrorists	
Mass Shooters	

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Applications of Threat Assessment

Law Enforcement	Schools
Assassins	Bullying and fighting
Stalkers	Sexual harassment
Terrorists	Racial/ethnic bias
Mass Shooters	School shootings

Distinguishing Aspects of School Threat Assessment

- 1. School setting.
- 2. Facilitate learning and development.
- 3. Create a positive school climate.
- 4. Include parent involvement.

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What are some challenges of school threat assessment?

- 1. Compared to adults, students
 - frequently make threats;
 - often engage in fights;
- 2. Over-reactions are common and have pervasive negative consequences.
- 3. Schools have a duty to educate.

What is Threat Assessment?

Threat assessment is a problemsolving approach to violence prevention that involves assessment and intervention with students who have threatened violence in some way.

Prevention means "to keep something from happening"



Crisis response is not prevention.



A crisis occurs when prevention has failed.

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You don't prevent forest fires by waiting until the trees are blazing.



You don't prevent forest fires by waiting until the trees are blazing.



https://www.npr.org/2019/08/09/748836909/careful-with-those-birthday-candles-smokey-beloved-bear-turns-75

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Warning: Photo of gunman





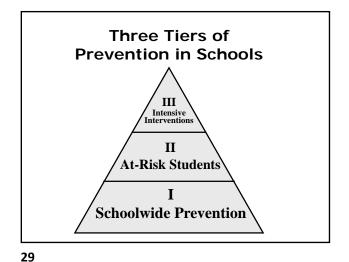




Shootings seem unpredictable, but, Prevention does not require prediction!

> House Education and Labor Committee **Hearing on Campus Safety** May 15, 2007

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Prevention does not require prediction.



We cannot predict who will have an accident, but safety regulations make safer roads, cars, and drivers.

Universal, primary, or tier 1 prevention

Prevention can reduce risk factors.



We cannot predict who will get cancer, but we can identify risk and protective factors that reduce cancer rates dramatically.

Selected, secondary, or tier 2 prevention

Prevention can prevent deterioration.

dent accused of threat 'at bottom of emotional abvss'



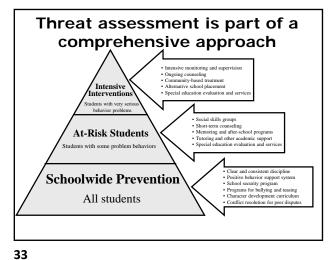
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We can intervene to resolve problem situations before they deteriorate into violence.

Intensive, tertiary, or tier 3 prevention

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Fear is a barrier to prevention.



School shootings are so traumatic that they skew perceptions of school safety and convince the public and policymakers that there are dramatic needs for security measures.

In 2021 there were at least 138 incidents of gunfire on school grounds, resulting in 28 deaths and 80 injuries nationally.



https://everytownresearch.org/maps/gunfire-on-school-grounds/

In 2021 there were at least 138 incidents of gunfire on school grounds, resulting in 28 deaths and 80 injuries nationally.

How many shootings take place outside of schools?

In 2021 there were at least 138 incidents of gunfire on school grounds, resulting in 28 deaths and 80 injuries nationally.

2021
20,820 homicides
40,534 injuries
61,354 shootings

In 2021 there were at least 138 incidents of gunfire on school grounds, resulting in 28 deaths and 80 injuries nationally.

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In 2021 there were at least 138 incidents of gunfire on school grounds, resulting in 28 deaths and 80 injuries nationally.

For every shooting victim in a school there are 568 victims outside a school

(61,354 - 138)÷ 138 = 444

In 2021 there were at least 138 incidents of gunfire on school grounds, resulting in 28 deaths and 80 injuries nationally.

Schools are far safer than the public perceives.

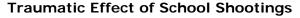
https://everytownresearch.org/maps/gunfire-on-school-grounds/

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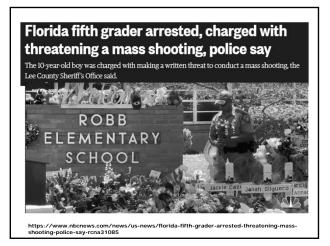
Locations of 11,383 Homicides Residence Street/Sidewalk Parking lot/garage Store/gas station 2020 FBI NIBRS data from 15,875 of 18.623 U.S. law enforcement agencies Restaurant/bar Residences have 570x more homicides than schools. Hotel/motel 232 Restaurants have 24x more homicides 217 Public Building/Business than schools. K-12 School 10 Source: FBI National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) database for 2020 https://crime-data-explorer.app.cloud.gov/pages/explorer/crime-trend

When was the last time a student was murdered at one of Virginia's K-12 public schools?





School shootings are so traumatic that they convince the public that schools are unsafe.



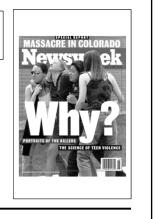
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- 1. School Suspensions
- 2. School Fortification



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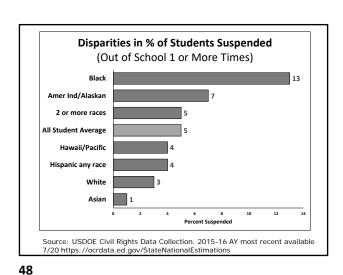
The *Expansion* of Zero Tolerance



From No Guns to

- No Toy Guns
- No Nail clippers
- No Plastic utensils
- No Finger-pointing
- No Jokes
- No Drawings
- No Rubber band shooting

No accidental violations



Threat assessment is an alternative to zero tolerance

- · Zero tolerance uses punitive discipline for all students regardless of the circumstances or the seriousness of their behavior.
- · Threat assessment considers the context and content of the behavior. The student's intentions matter.

Fear of School Violence Drives New School Security Industry Newtown Rampage Spurs \$5 Billion School Security **Spending** http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-11-14/schools-boosting-security-spending-after-newtown-mass

Research on School Security

Routledge Metal Detectors and

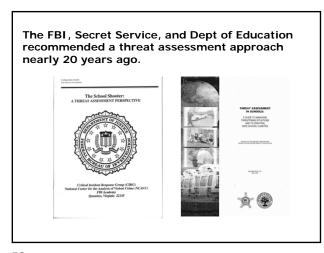
Billie Gastic

Little evidence of increased safety. Concerns

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US. Secret Service reports on school safety

53 54

School Safety Strategies and Their Effects on the Occurrence of School-Based Violence in U.S. High Schools: An Exploratory Study

Feeling Safe at School

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Emily E. Tanner-Smith · Benjamin W. Fisher

Visible School Security Measures and Student Academic Performance, Attendance, and Postsecondary Aspirations

Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management
Structural school safety measures, SROs, and school-related delinquent behavior
and perceptions of safety: A state-of-the-art review
Jennifer M. Reingle Gonzalez, Katelyn K. Jetelina, Wesley G. Jennings,

that students are more anxious.

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.

Accurate Threat Assessment Avoids 2 Errors ...

1. Over-reaction

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



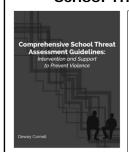
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Accurate Threat Assessment Avoids 2 Errors ...

2. Under-Reaction



Virginia Model of School Threat Assessment



2018 Manual

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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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Team Approach: Don't be this guy!



Principal or Assistant Principal	Leads team.
School Resource Officer	Advises team, responds to illegal actions and emergencies.
Mental Health Staff (School psychologists, counselors, social workers)	Team member to conduct mental health assessments.
	Team member to take lead role in follow-up interventions.
Option team members Teachers, aides, other staff	Report threats, provide input to team.

What is a threat?



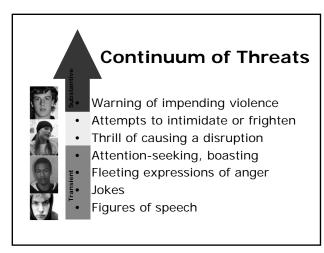
A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone.

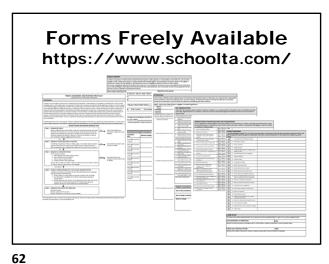
Threats may be spoken, written, or gestured.

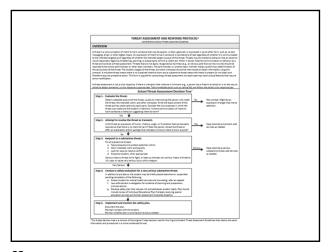
Threats may be direct or indirect, and need not be communicated to the intended victim or victims. ("I'm going to get him.")

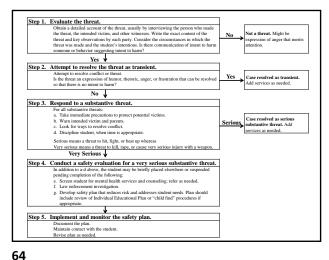
Weapon possession is presumed to be a threat unless circumstances clearly indicate otherwise. ("I forgot my knife was in my backpack.")

When in doubt, assume it is a threat.

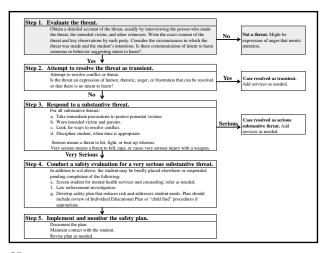


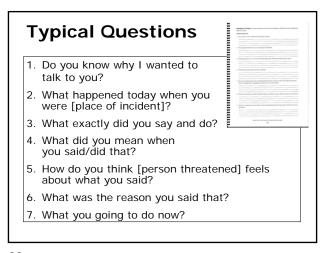


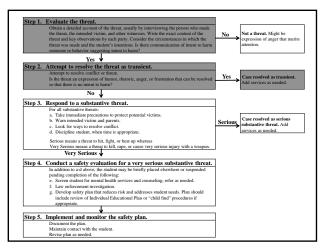




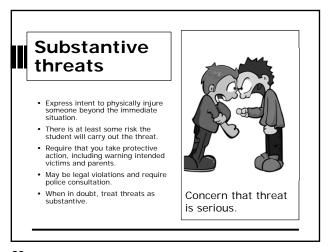
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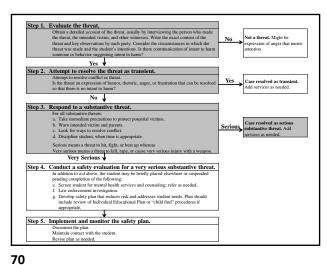




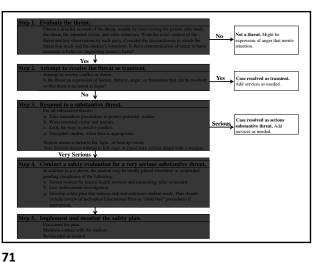


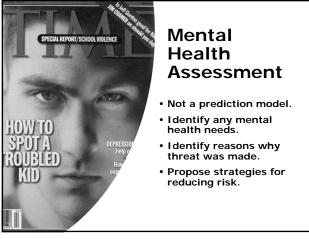






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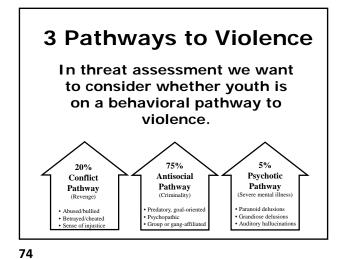


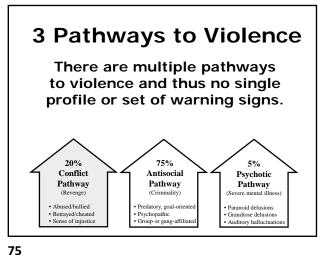
Do not copy without permission dcornell@virginia.edu

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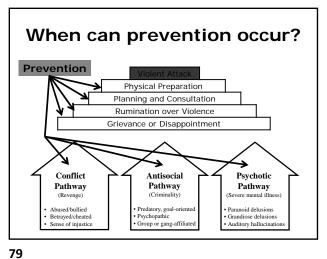


3 Pathways to Violence The most common group are youth with a history of conduct disorder leading to delinquency. Conflict Antisocial Psychotic Pathway evere mental illness Pathway Pathway Abused/bullied Paranoid delusions Predatory, goal-orient Psychopathic
 Group or gang-affiliat Grandiose delusions
Auditory hallucinati Sense of injustice

3 Pathways to Violence A small percentage of youth who commit violent crimes have a mental illness with psychotic symptoms. 20% Psychotic Antisocial Conflict Pathway Pathway Pathway Abused/bullied Betrayed/cheater Sense of injustic Paranoid delusions Predatory, goal-oriented Psychopathic Group or gang-affiliated Auditory hallucination **77**

3 Pathways to Violence Physical Preparation Planning and Consultation Rumination over Violence Grievance or Disappointment 75% Conflict Antisocial Psychotic Pathway Pathway Pathway · Abused/bullied Predatory, goal-oriente Paranoid delusions Betrayed/cheated
 Sense of injustice Psychopathi Group or gang-affiliate Auditory hallucination

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Journal of School School Psychology Violence Bulletin Behavioral Disorders JOURNAL OF THREAT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT



Research on Threat Assessment

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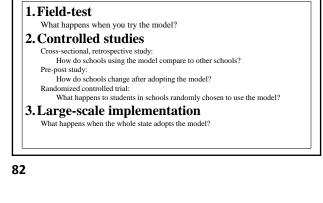
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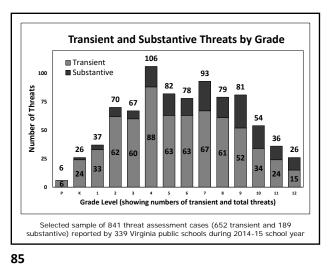


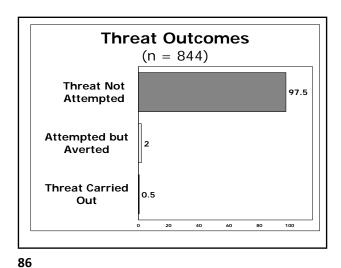
Research on Threat Assessment

- 1. 99% of threats not carried out.
- 2. Only 1% expelled, 1% arrested.
- 3. Suspension rates decreased.
- 4. Racial disparities reduced or absent.
- 5. Counseling used more often.
- 6. More positive school climate.

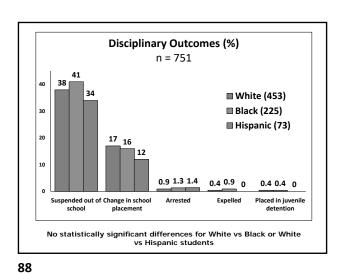


Threat Classification (%) n = 856100 23 ■ Substantive 80 of Cases **■** Transient 60 77 Threat Type

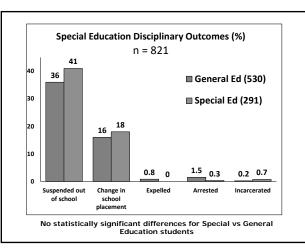


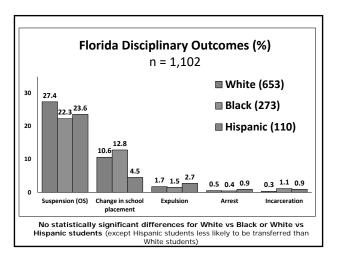


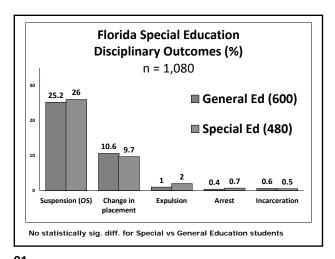
Disciplinary Outcomes (%) n = 844 Reprimand Suspension out of school Suspension in school Expulsion reduced to suspension Court charges (31) Arrested (9) Expelled (4) Juvenile detention (3) Percentages for 844 threat cases from 339 schools. One case can involve more than one outcome.



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Training in School-Based Threat Assessment Evidence-Based Threat Assessment for Schools since 2002 https://www.schoolta.com/

Bright Future of School Threat Assessment

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