

SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT (BTAM): Best Practices for K-12 Schools

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April 2, 2021

Threat Assessment & Management Provides:

- Teaming process
- Descriptive information
- Common language
- Community systems approach
- Multiple data points
- Contextual & developmental considerations
- Level of concern
- Safety planning for reducing risk:
 - skill development
 - relationship building
 - discipline/consequences
 - monitoring
 - environmental management
- Documentation

Pathway to Violence

Intensity of Effort

Implementation

**Preparation/
Acquisition**

Planning

Ideation

- Means
- Method
- Opportunity
- Proximity



Workshop Objectives

- Participants will learn:
 - how to establish a consistent school/district-wide approach to behavioral threat assessment and management.
 - critical factors contributing to risk
 - best practice guidelines as established by prior legal cases
 - primary prevention strategies to break the code of silence
 - assessment procedures
 - strategies for interventions and postvention
 - strategies for working with difficult parents
 - from case study examples and shared forms that illustrate the process

Workshop Outline

- Foundations of Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM)
- Legal & Ethical Guidance
- Behavioral Threat Assessment & Management Process
- Implementation and Communication

Foundations of Behavioral Threat Assessment & Management (BTAM)

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What is BTAM?

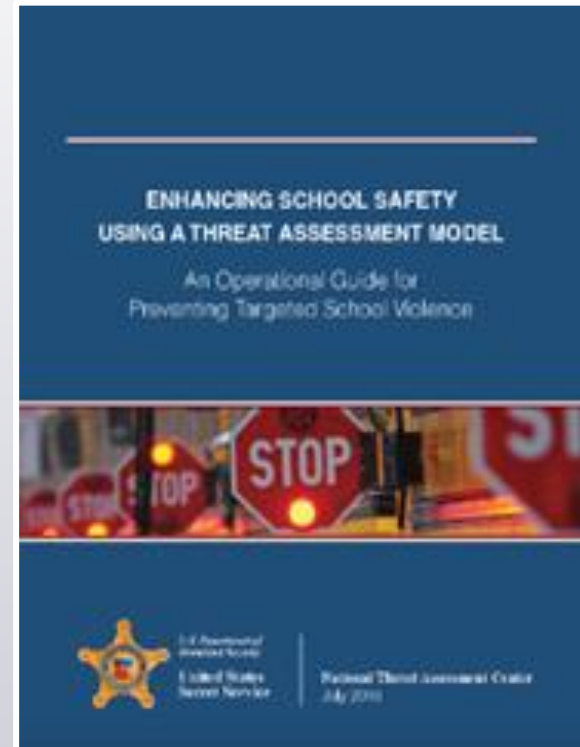
- Systematic and fact-based
- Collection and analysis of multiple sources of information
- Focuses on patterns of thinking and behavior
- Individual and dynamic factors
- Level of concern based on behaviors detected
- Escalating behaviors?
- Do they **POSE** a threat?
- Goal is risk management (interrupt pathway)
- Must measure change (progress monitor)

How is K-12
unique?

Building a School BTAM Program

1. Establish a multidisciplinary team
2. Define prohibited and concerning behaviors
3. Create a central reporting mechanism
4. Define threshold for law enforcement intervention
5. Establish threat assessment procedures
6. Develop risk management options
7. Create and promote safe school climates
8. Conduct training for all stakeholders

8 Steps



National Threat Assessment Center

**US Secret Service &
US Dept of Homeland Security**

Secret Service Threat Assessment Model

Three guiding principles

1. No single type of perpetrator.
 - Targeted violence = interaction of perpetrator, setting, situation, and target.
2. Distinction between posing a threat and making a threat.
 - Many who pose a threat will not make a threat before the attack, and
 - Many who make a threat may pose no harm.
3. Targeted violence
 - Product of an understandable and often discernable pattern of behavior and thinking.

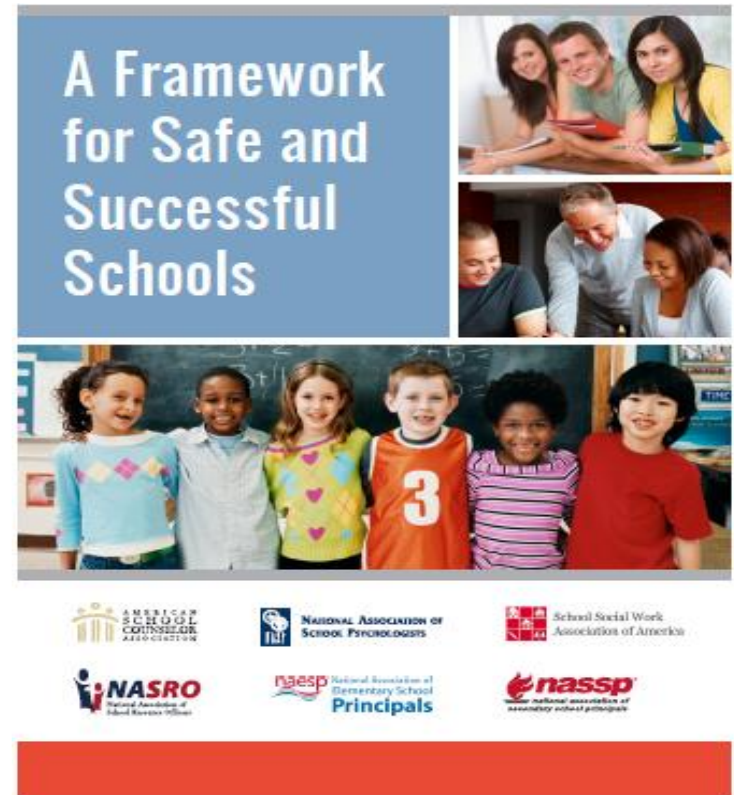
Elements of Quality BTAM

1. Establish authority to conduct inquiry
2. Investigative, skeptical, inquisitive mindset
3. Based on facts, rather than characteristics/traits/profiles
4. Integrated systems approach
 - Multidisciplinary BTAM teams
 - Interagency collaboration
5. Assess if poses a threat, not whether made a threat
6. Awareness training!

Foundation: Comprehensive School Safety

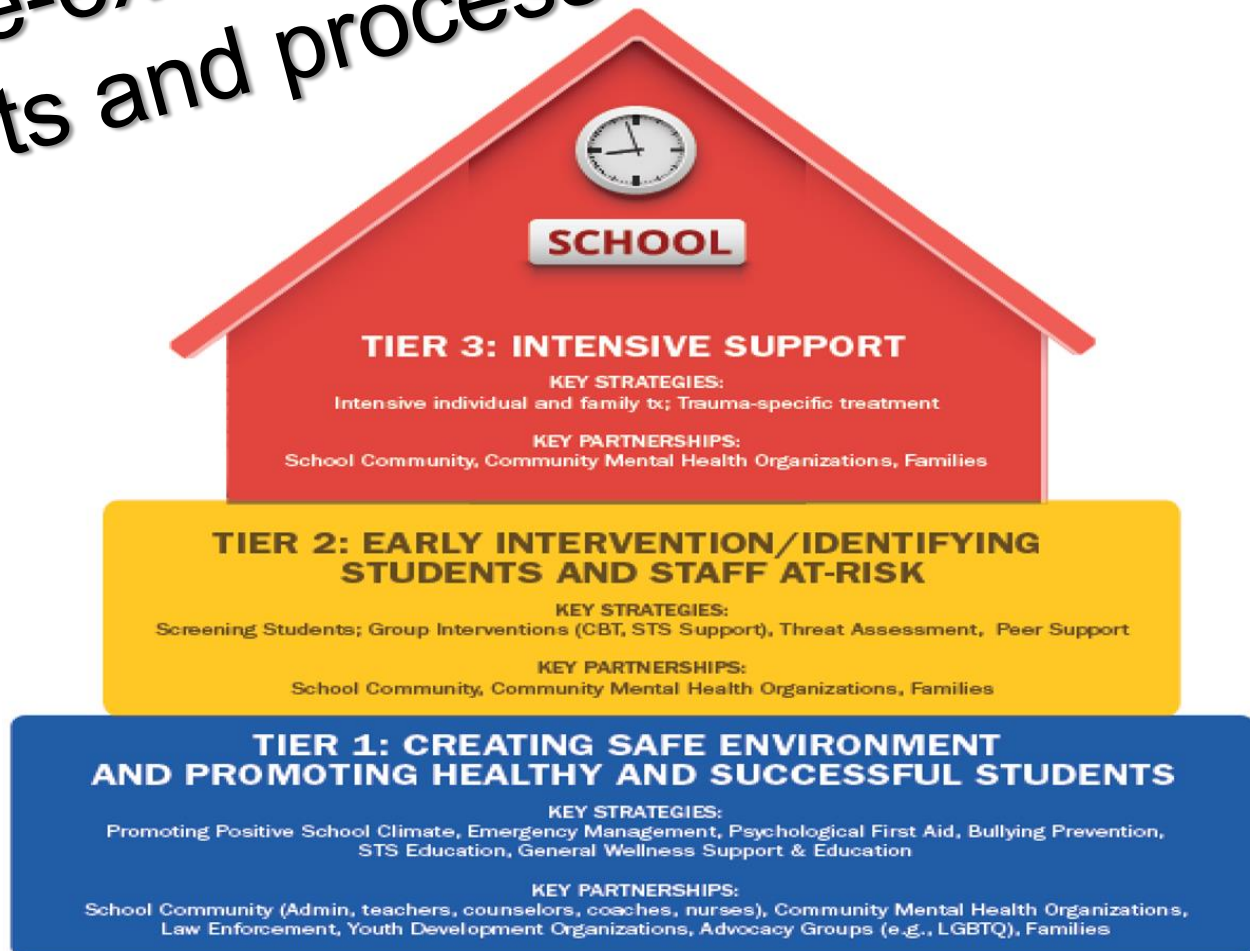
- **Framework:**

- Safe and supportive school climate
- Collaboration
- MTSS
- Integrated learning supports
- Physical and psychological safety
- Universal screenings
- Data-based decision making
- Evidenced-based interventions



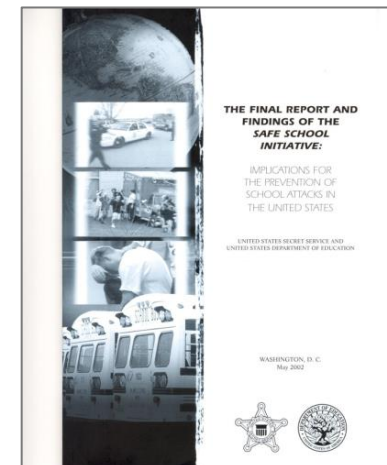
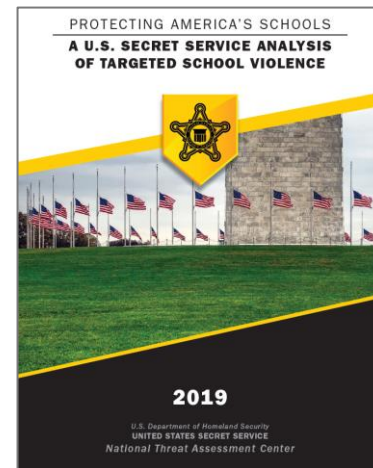
<http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/a-framework-for-safe-and-successful-schools>

BTAM is designed to interface
with pre-existing MTSS
supports and processes



Crisis Preparedness is also critical!

- Most Attacks Were Not Stopped by Law Enforcement
 - Have protocols & procedures for managing threats and other behaviors of concern
 - We must act quickly
 - Practice and evaluate crisis procedures routinely

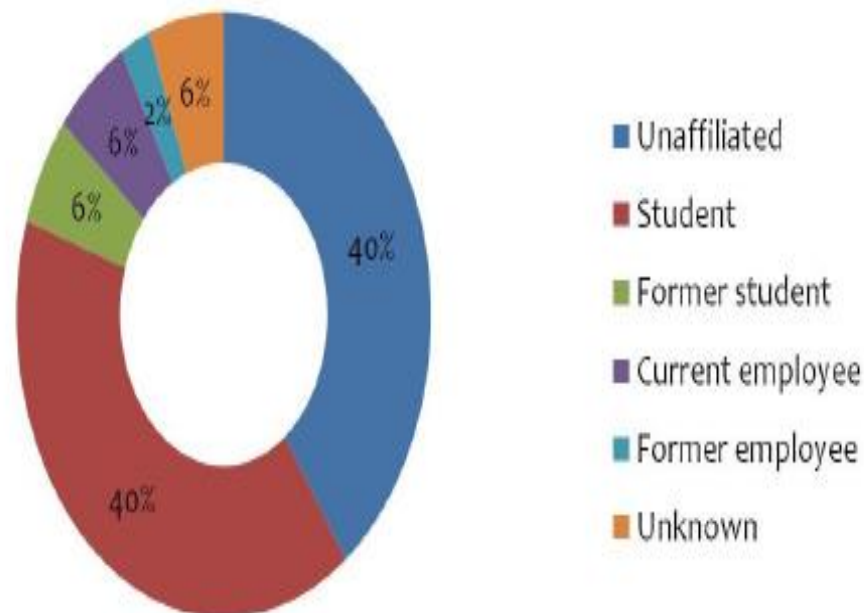


Schools Associated Violent Deaths

Homicide and Suicide at School

- Most school-associated student homicides involve a firearm and a single victim and offender.
- In 80% of school-associated firearm-related homicides and suicides, weapons used were obtained from home or from a friend or relative.

Shooter's Relationship to School



Staff Development & Training:

ALL Staff

The Path to
Violence Video

- General Staff Procedures & Awareness Training
 - All school staff members are responsible for recognizing warning signs and reporting
 - Listen to your “gut” (Langman, 2010; de Becker & Assoc, 1998)
- Clear and centralized reporting procedures (avoid “silo effect”)
- Staff know all reporting procedures for:
 - Bullying
 - Suicide risk
 - Child abuse & neglect
 - Sexual assault
 - Harassment
 - Violence or danger concerns
 - Substance abuse
 - Cyber/internet/texting concerns

Legal and Ethical Guidance

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Legal Issues: U.S. Constitution

- *1st Amendment*: Freedom of speech
 - *Not* entitled to protection:
 - fighting words, obscenity, and defamation
 - student speech which causes substantial disruption or material interference with school activities or invades rights of others
 - **“true threat”**
- *4th Amendment*: Unreasonable search & seizure
 - Reasonable suspicion
 - Scope of search reasonably related to objective and not excessively intrusive

Legal Issues: U.S. Constitution

- *14th Amendment*: Due process and equal protection
 - Action must be related to school's interest in protecting students or maintaining order in school
 - Failure to adopt and implement adequate safety measures can be grounds for tort claim in event of school violence
 - Avoid discriminatory practices
 - IDEA guidelines
- *Tort Claim* (under state law): negligence claim for failure to intervene

Legal Issues: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974

- Applies to educational records - New Exception (December 2008): 34 CFR § 99.36
 - May disclose information to appropriate parties without consent when knowledge of information is necessary to protect the health and safety of a student or other individual, if there is a significant and articulable threat to the health and safety of an individual.
 - Must be directly related to a threat of actual, impending, or imminent emergency
- Prior Exceptions allowed
 - Educational Agencies and Institutions may share information from educational records of at-risk or delinquent youth
 - Court order/subpoena or criminal investigations
 - School officials where students is enrolled or seeks to enroll

What is an Educational Record?

Education Records	Not Education Records
Transcripts	Records that are kept in the sole possession of the maker and used only as personal memory aids
Disciplinary records	Law enforcement unit records
Standardized test results	Grades on peer-graded papers before they are collected and recorded by a teacher
Health (including mental health) and family history records	Records created or received by a school after an individual is no longer in attendance and that are not directly related to the individual's attendance at the school
Records on services provided to students under the <i>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)</i>	Employee records that relate exclusively to an individual in that individual's capacity as an employee
Records on services and accommodations provided to students under <i>Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973</i> and <i>Title II of the ADA</i>	Information obtained through a school official's personal knowledge or observation and not from student's education records

Legal Issues: 1994 FERPA Amendments Regarding Staff and Records

- Disciplinary action may be kept in student records if the behavior posed a significant risk to the safety and well being of that student, other students or staff.
- This information may be disclosed to staff who have legitimate educational interest in the behavior of the student.

****LIMITATIONS DO NOT TRANSLATE INTO ABSOLUTE PROHIBITIONS****

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/safeschools/index.html>

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/index.html>

US Dept. of Justice/FBI (2017)

Legal Issues: Duty to Warn/Inform

- When a student is a danger to self or others there is a duty to warn.
 - Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California



Legal Issues: Foreseeability & Negligence

- *Foreseeability* of potential safety issues
 - Must report
- *Negligent* response on the part of the school
 - Notification
 - Supervision
 - Staff training
 - Identification
 - Intervention
- Immunity??
 - school professional can be sued for failing to protect students even if district has been found to have immunity from such a lawsuit

Current Legal Cases

Bowe Cleveland v Taft Union H.S. District, CA

- Case NO:S-1500-CV-279256, Kern County Superior Court
- Jury awarded 3.8 million dollars to student victim
 - District = 53% liable
 - Bryan and his family = 47% liable



Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

Some misconduct can trigger federal antidiscrimination law(s)

- “School districts **may violate these civil rights statutes and the Department’s implementing regulations** when peer harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability is sufficiently serious that it creates a hostile environment and such harassment is encouraged, tolerated, not adequately addressed, or ignored by school employees.”
 - Harassment **does not** have to specifically include intent to harm, be directed at a specific target, or involve repeated incidents.
- Schools must do more than take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end the harassment.
 - Must also *“eliminate any hostile environment and its effects, and prevent the harassment from occurring.”*

Legal & Ethical Implications

- No Maleficence/Do No Harm
- Competence
- Use Team Approach
- Confidentiality & Exceptions
- Notifying and Involve Parents
 - Transfer of Responsibility
- Provide appropriate postvention response
- DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT!!!!
- Liability insurance

Legal Issues:

Establish a District-Wide Policy

- Specific, well-articulated procedures for exploring allegations
 - Require prompt, discrete, and responsible action from school officials.
- Include protocols for:
 - Establishing and training the BTAM team
 - Evaluating and interviewing potential offender
 - Notifying and working with parents
 - Awareness training for school community
 - Interviewing other students and staff
 - Reporting, documentation, and interventions procedures
 - Involving additional professionals (e.g., mental health, social service, law enforcement)
 - Providing follow-up observation and services
 - Responding to media (should the need arise)

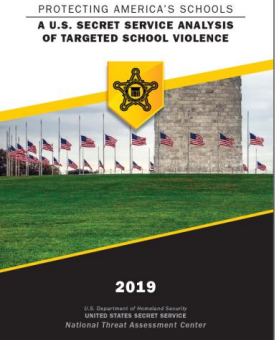
Legal Issues:

Establish a Systemic Process

- Utilizes effective & relevant multi-disciplinary approach, capable of addressing all threats
- Enables centralized awareness of developing concerns through active outreach programs & consultations
- Facilitates a thorough & contextual assessment
- Implements proactive & integrated case management
- Monitors & re-assesses case on a longitudinal basis
- Conducts all practices in accordance with relevant laws, policies, and standards of practice
- Adapts to challenges & changing needs.

Behavioral Threat Assessment & Management Process

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Secret Service Reports: Targeted School Violence



2019 (Secret Service Analysis)

2002 (Safe School Initiative)

No accurate profile of student attacker

- or type of school targeted

No accurate or useful profile of student

Attackers had multiple motives

- most common = grievance w/
 1. classmate(s)
 2. school staff, romantic relationship, personal issues

Most used firearms, most often acquired in home

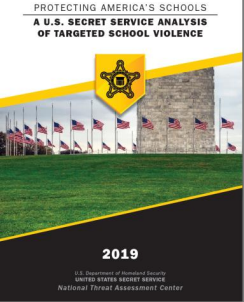
Most had access to/used weapons prior

- most attacks stopped by non-law enforcement

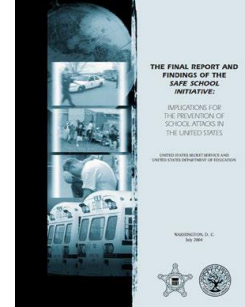
Most experienced psychological, behavioral, or developmental symptoms

Half had interests in violent topics

Most demonstrated interest in violence



Secret Service Reports: Targeted School Violence



2019	2002
<p>All experienced social stressors involving relationships w/ peers or romantic partners</p>	<p>Most had difficulties coping with significant losses or personal failures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many had considered suicide
<p>Nearly every experienced negative home life factors</p>	
<p>Most victims of bullying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • often observed by others 	<p>Many felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to attack</p>
<p>Most hx of school discipline actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • many contact with law enforcement 	<p>Most had no history of prior violent or criminal behavior</p>
<p>All exhibited concerning behaviors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most elicited concern • Most communicated intent 	<p>Most incidence other people knew of ideas/plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most did not threaten target directly • Most engaged in behaviors that concerned others; indicated need for help • Some cases other students involved in attack plan

Inquiry verses Investigation

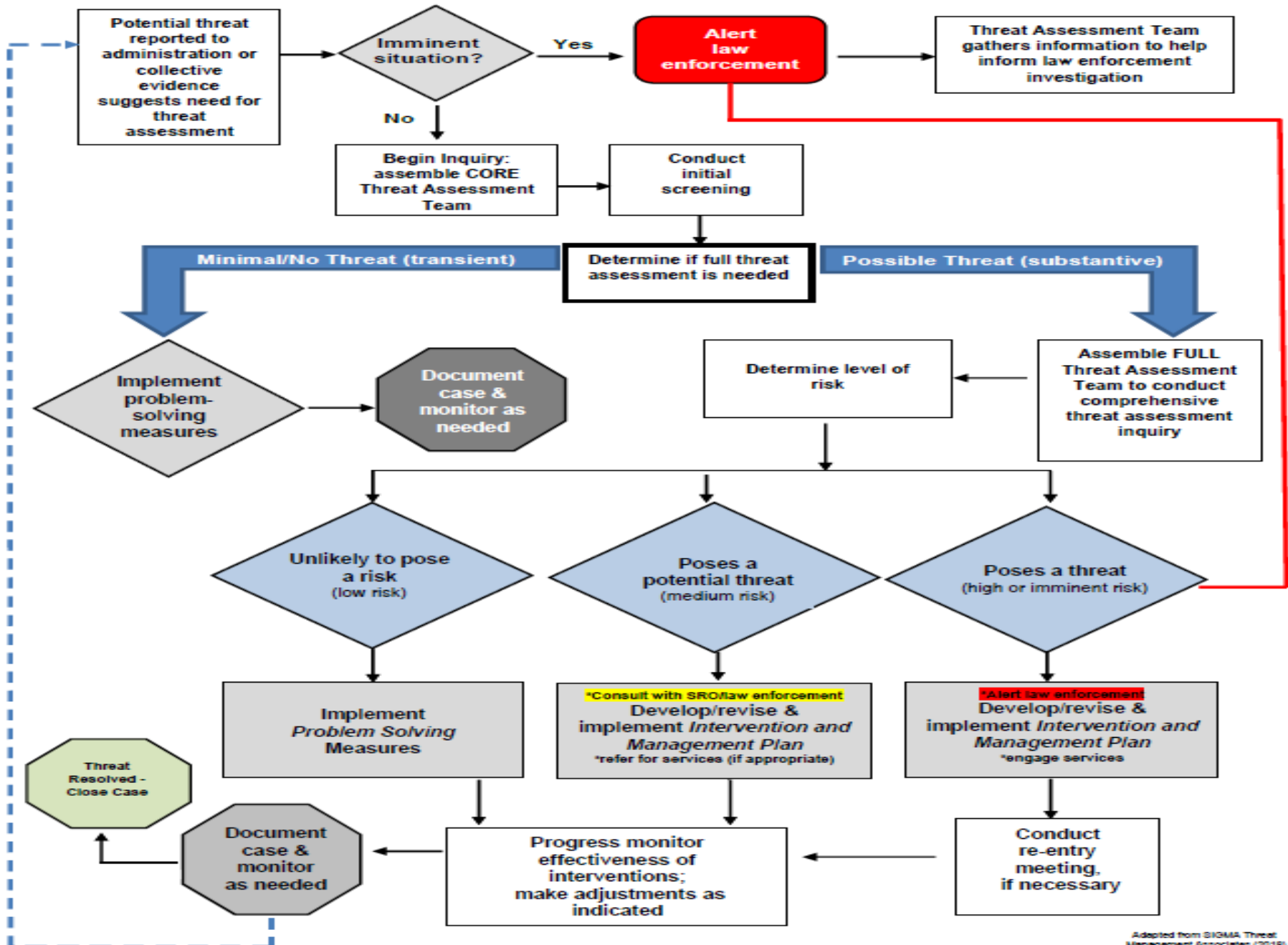
- ***Inquiry*** - initiated when information about a student's behavior and communications passes an agreed-upon threshold of concern.
 - Conducted by school team
- ***Investigation*** - initiated when potential threat is serious/imminent
 - Conducted by police with school involvement to provide information

The central question in a threat assessment inquiry or investigation is whether a student poses a threat, not whether the student has made a threat.”

Process at a Glance

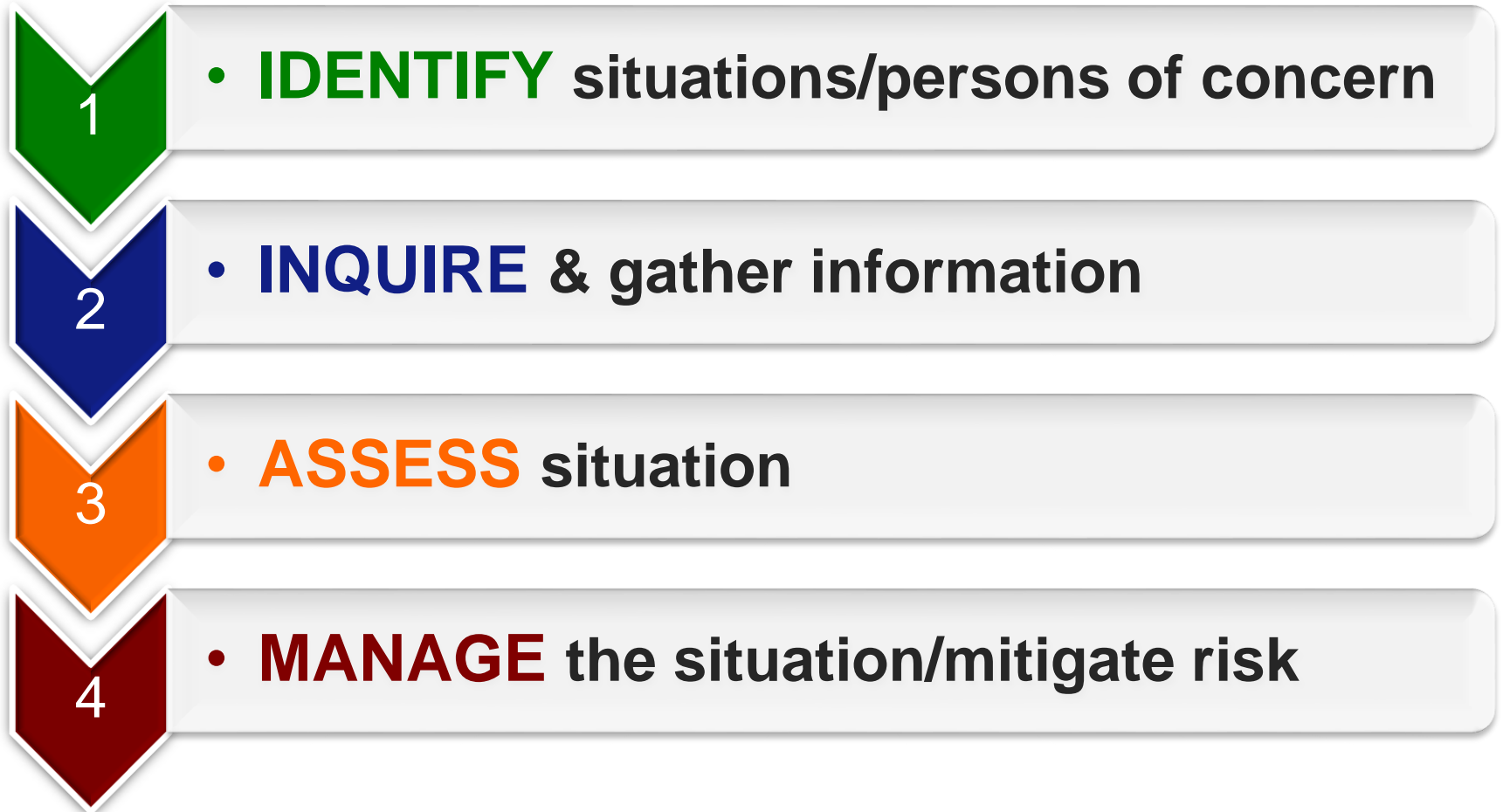
1. Assemble team
2. Gather preliminary information & conduct screening
3. If proceed to full assessment, gather data from multiple sources
4. Organize and analyze information
5. Determine level of risk/concern
6. Develop intervention and monitoring plan
7. Document
8. Progress monitor – stay engaged!

Threat Assessment and Management Process



Threat Assessment

A systematic process that is designed to:



Limitations of Risk Assessments

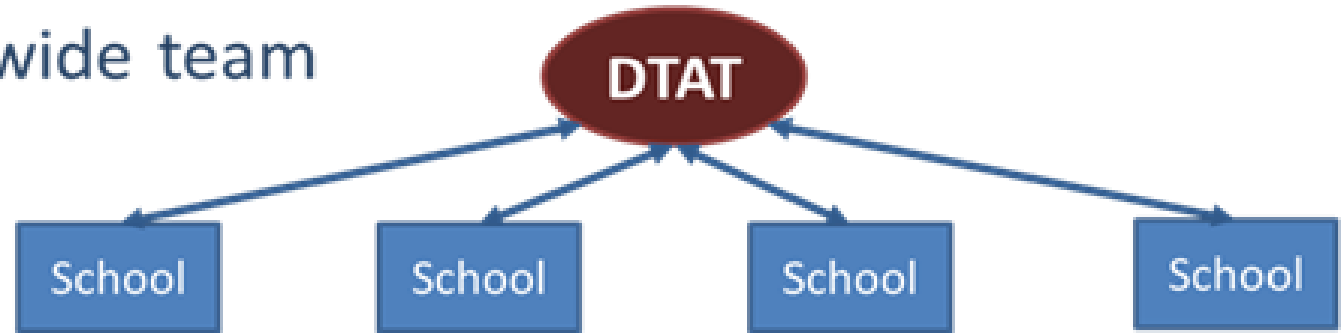
(Other-directed violence)

- Protocol based on research of targeted school violence incidents at school (Secret Service, FBI)
 - not a foolproof method
- Are not reliable procedures for incidents of violence motivated by gang involvement, drugs or alcohol, sexual gratification
- Don't provide predictions of future behavior, placement, or eligibility

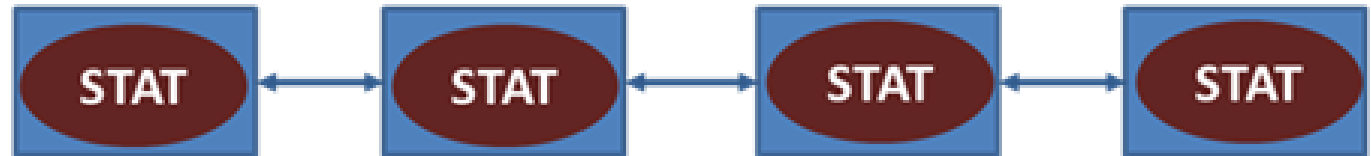
1. Assemble Team

Threat Assessment Program Structure

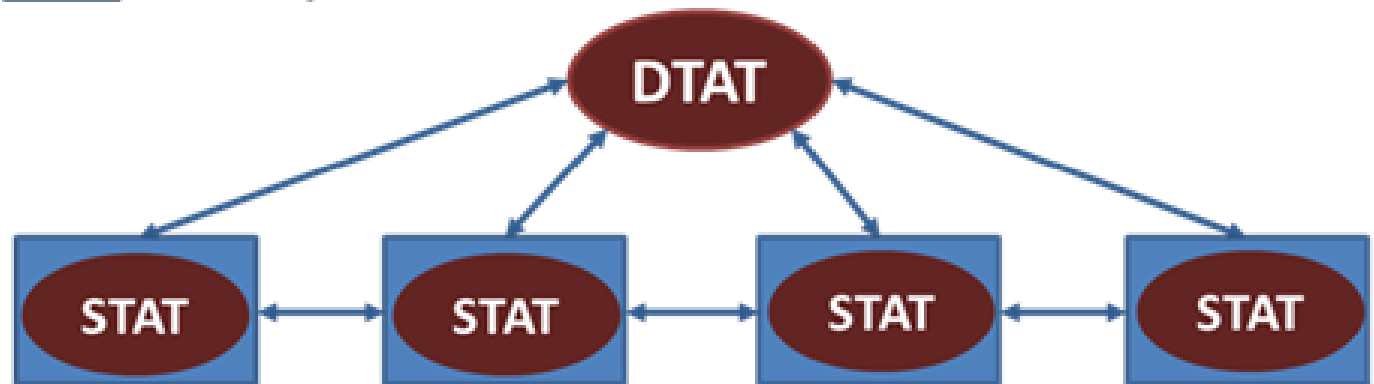
- One district-wide team



- Multiple school/area-based teams



- One district and multiple school/area based teams



BTAM Team Members

Core Members: Lead Screening & Full Assessment

- BTAM Case Manager
- Administrator
- School Psychologist, Counselor, and/or Social Worker (at least one, prefer two)
- School Resource Officer/Law Enforcement (Moderate – High/Imminent)

**Minimum of 3 members on core team*

Other Potential Members:

- Educators, Mentors, Coaches, Nurse
- Persons with Expertise:
 - Human Resources
 - Legal
 - Special Education
- External Consultant (i.e. threat management specialist, independent medical/psychological examiner)

Determining level of concern/risk and appropriate interventions is a team decision!

School Officials vs. Agents of Law Enforcement?

- Courts uniformly held that school officials who question students about possible violation does not, absent of other circumstances, acts as a law enforcement officer or agent of the police (if act independent of police)
 - “School officials are neither trained nor equipped to conduct police investigations, but they must regularly conduct *inquiries*.”
 - *If school officials inquiring for disciplinary purposes, students not entitled to Miranda warnings.*
- SRO/Law Enforcement: school officials or law enforcement officer (LEO)?
 - MOU – specify law enforcement and school safety functions are separate
 - Must specify in annual FERPA notification to parents if SRO/LEO’s are school officials with a “legitimate educational interest”

Critical Read!!

United States Department of Education (2019). **"School Resource Officers, School Law Enforcement Units, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)"**

- https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/SRO_FAQs_2-5-19_0.pdf James (2017)

Others?

- Who else in your building could potentially serve on a threat assessment team?
- What role would they serve?
- What experience or skill set might they bring to your team?

Legal & Ethical Implications

- No Maleficence/Do No Harm
- Competence
- Use Team Approach
- Confidentiality & Exceptions
- Notifying and Involve Parents
 - Transfer of Responsibility
- Provide appropriate postvention response
- DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT!!!!
- Liability insurance

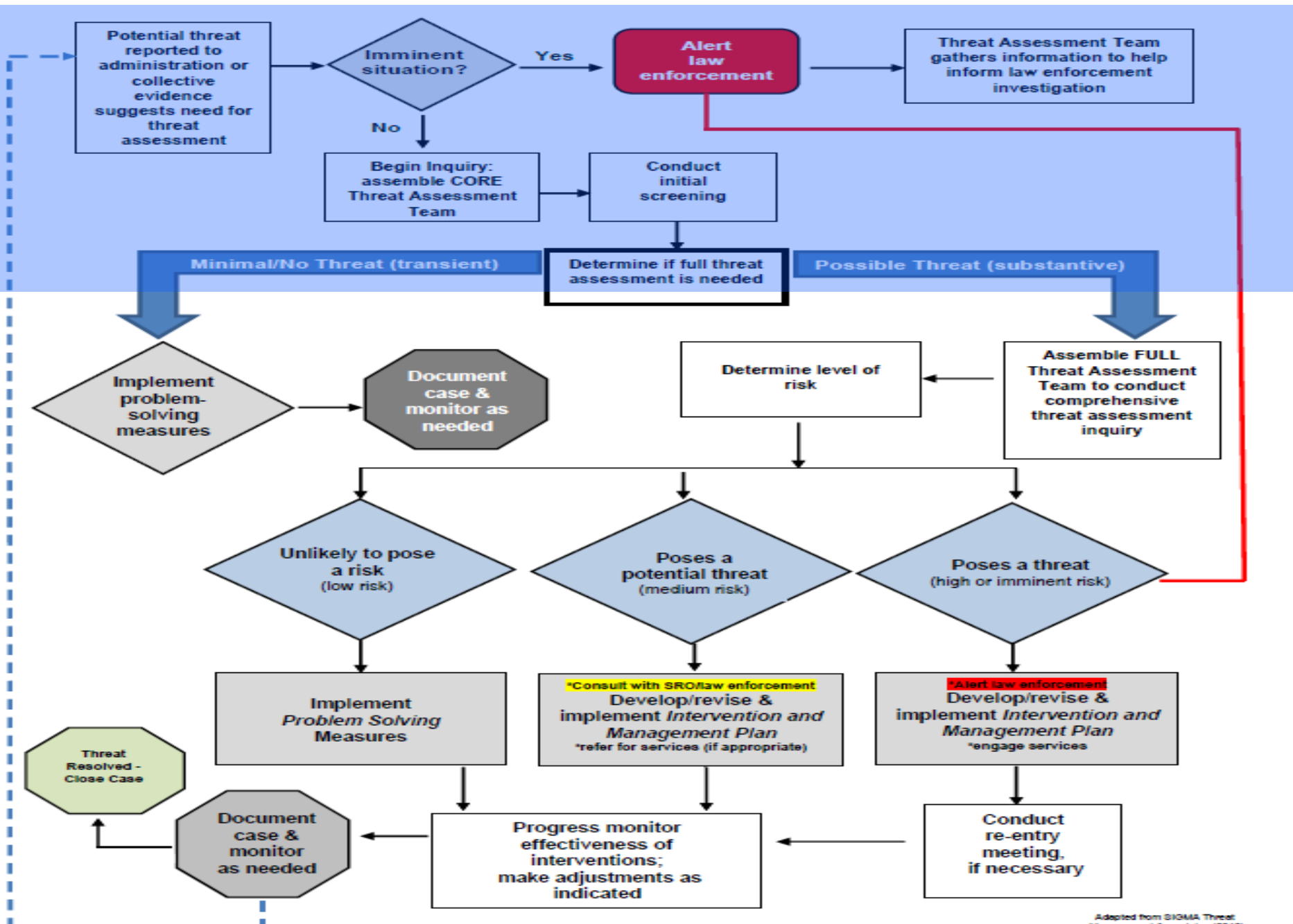
Effective BTAM Team

- Understands value of caretaking
- Plans well and understand urgency, when appropriate
- Cooperates and shares information effectively amongst members
- Sets rules and boundaries
- Provides guidance and follow-through for persons
- Ensures implementation of management plan
- Continually re-evaluates active cases and re-engages when necessary
- Understands patience is needed
- Meets on regular basis

GOAL & FOCUS:

Identify the need for interventions, not solely focused on punishment.

2. Gather Preliminary Information & Conduct Screening



Legitimate Threat?

NO LEGITIMATE THREAT	POSSIBLE LEGITIMATE THREAT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Made a threat but does not pose a threat.• No “true” threat.• Do not express a lasting harm to someone.• Intended as figures of speech or• Reflect feelings that dissipate in a short period after reflection.• Can be resolved or managed through problem-solving process or existing supports. <p><i>Can be easily resolved.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Context and meaning support legitimate safety concern.• Threat communicated intent to harm.• Person(s) on receiving end feel threatened.• Needs further assessment to determine level of concern and actions to be taken <p><i>Requires additional assessment and supports.</i></p>

Key Screening Questions

1. Is it an emergency or imminent situation?
 - If yes, call 911/notify SRO
 - If no, to go #2

2. Does it involve any of the following? If so, notify Title IX Coordinator
 - Sexual assault
 - Sexual harassment
 - Dating violence
 - Stalking
 - Domestic violence assault

3. Do you need to run a threat assessment?
 - If yes, go to #4
 - If no, document screening and close case.

4. Does the student of concern have a disability with IEP/504 Plan?
 - Is the threatening behavior possibly a disability manifestation (per SPED/504)?
 - Can the threatening behavior be managed under existing IEP/504 Plan?
 - If NO, run a Threat Assessment.
 - If YES, engage SPED/504 team.

Identifying Threats When They Occur:

What Constitutes a Threat?

- Expression indicating an intent to harm someone
 - Verbal
 - Written/Social Media
 - Artistic
 - Symbolic (gestures)
- Pattern of escalating behaviors suggesting violence may be possible
- Weapon possession
 - presumed to be a threat unless circumstances clearly indicate otherwise

Types of Threats

- **Direct Threat**
 - statement of clear, explicit intent to harm
- **Indirect Threat**
 - violence is implied or phrased tentatively
- **Conditional Threat**
 - made contingent on set of circumstances
- **Veiled Threat**
 - vague & subject to interpretation

*Most offenders do not threaten targets directly!

“Context is more important than content.”

(Gavin de Becker & Associates, 2017)

Assessing Threats



Process:

- Ask in detail about the material
- Be persistent and specific with questions
- Express concern
- Watch for non-verbal cues
- Triangulate data
- Share information with team
- Monitor future materials

***This is a conversation,
NOT an interrogation!!!!***

Content:

- Understand the context
- Consider if written and artistic material are practice attempts
- Assess for themes:
 - violence
 - relationship dynamics/intensity
 - proximity
 - increasing intensity
 - time imperative
- Assess for past expressions
- Assess access to or knowledge of weapons

***I have become acquainted with guns
I have used everything from a 9mm to a 12 gauge
I have hit the smallest target quite accurately.***

***I have quickly set up an AK-47
I have killed the smallest, most innocent rabbit
and never stopped to think about it.***

***I have blown away the dumbest deer
and let its body be carried away,
It will never again see the light of day.***

***But, I don't know what I will kill next
I have the urge to kill many things
But some things are off limits to kill.***

***I will blow away whatever runs.
I have become acquainted with guns.***

-9th grade student

Screening Tool

No Legitimate Threat



Problem Solving and/or Existing Supports

Possible Threat



Needs Further Assessment

SC Guide – Appendix H

School-Based Behavioral Threat Assessment – Screening Tool

Student Name:	School:	DOB:	Today's Date:
Does the student have an: <input type="checkbox"/> IEP or <input type="checkbox"/> 504	Disability:	Grade:	Identified Gender:
Date of Incident:	Time:		
Description of Incident that initiated screening:			
Parent/Guardian #1:	Phone:	Parent/Guardian #2:	Phone:
<p>Core threat assessment team members: *At minimum the screening team shall include an administrator and at least one school mental health professional (e.g., school psychologist, school social worker, school counselor, mental health counselor) to complete screening and determine if a full threat assessment is warranted.</p> <p>**Consultation with School Resource Officer (SRO) and other school staff who have knowledge of student should be done to assess if recent behaviors have been of concern.</p>			
<p>NOTE: <i>weapon involvement or threat with specificity, immediately proceed to full assessment with SRO/law enforcement in involvement.</i></p>			

*Core threat assessment team members complete entire screening, using the chart below, before making a decision. The decision must consider age, developmental level, credibility, and history of concerns regarding the student who made the threat. Credibility of the threat is based on the student's presentation of what happened, whether others feel threatened, and consideration of other information known about this student.

Refer to "School-based Behavioral Threat Assessment & Management: Best Practices Guide for South Carolina K-12 Schools" for additional guidance.

Check the level of concern for each factor to guide the team screening decision.		
<i>Note: Screeners do not capture every variable. The team may recommend conducting a full Threat Assessment if other variables warrant.</i>		
Factors to Consider	Minimal to No Threat (e.g. "Transient" = made a threat but does not pose a threat; can be resolved or managed through problem-solving process or existing supports)	Possible Threat – Needs Further Assessment (e.g. "Possible Substantive" = context and meaning support a legitimate safety concern that needs further assessment to more specifically determine level of concern and the actions needed to assure safety)
Type of threat	<input type="checkbox"/> No "true" threat (person on receiving end does not feel threatened; acknowledges threat was in response to a specific situation; and/or perceived as a joke; no intent) <input type="checkbox"/> No threat was made (words/actions expressed were taken from song lyrics, video games, movie, or other sources; no intent)	<input type="checkbox"/> Threat communicated with intent to harm other (verbal, non-verbal, electronic, written, pictures, gestures, social media) <input type="checkbox"/> Person(s) on receiving end is concerned/threat was not perceived as a joke Specify:
Target/victim	<input type="checkbox"/> No target/victim <input type="checkbox"/> Target/victim not identified	<input type="checkbox"/> Expressed thoughts of homicide/hurting specific target(s)/victim(s) *If Yes, there is a duty to contact law enforcement and to warn others
Threat was	<input type="checkbox"/> Taken out of context (no true threat) <input type="checkbox"/> Impulsive/not planned (e.g. anger/frustration in response to a specific situation/event)	<input type="checkbox"/> Perceived as a serious threat and evidence of forethought/planning Specify:
The plan itself	<input type="checkbox"/> No plan <input type="checkbox"/> Words/actions expressed were done in response to an assignment/prompt	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan has potential plausibility.
Access to weapons	<input type="checkbox"/> No known access to weapons <input type="checkbox"/> Access to weapons but only under careful supervision of adults, responsible use, no risk factors evident, no plan to harm others	<input type="checkbox"/> Has access to harmful or lethal weapons (e.g., guns) or is known to be trying to gain access and has risk factors of concern Specify: *Access with warning signs, duty to contact law enforcement/SRO.
Motive	<input type="checkbox"/> No motive expressed <input type="checkbox"/> Typical conflict and no known reason/motive for student to act on plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Expressed strong motivation/grievances/reasons for the planned violence. Sees violence as desirable/acceptable. Specify:
Perceptions	<input type="checkbox"/> No conflict evident. <input type="checkbox"/> Perceives as isolated incident and/or perceives problem solving solutions can be effective <input type="checkbox"/> No stressors are evident. <input type="checkbox"/> Has hope that stressors can be addressed/resolved; wants to live (no expression of disregard/ending life)	<input type="checkbox"/> A pattern of feeling victimized, bullied, or persecuted and/or perceives solutions to be ineffective or insufficient Specify: <input type="checkbox"/> Has expressed thoughts of hopelessness, helplessness, desperation, suicidal ideation, and/or disregard for life Specify: *If suicidal ideation must also conduct Suicide Risk Assessment.

3. Gather Data from Multiple Sources

(If proceed to full assessment)

SC Guide – Appendix I

APPENDIX I:
Behavioral Threat Assessment and Intervention Plan (BTAIP)

Student Name:	District/School:	Today's Date:
Grade:	DOB:	Was screener completed? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
Does the student have an identified educational disability under IDEA or Section 504? <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
If yes <input type="checkbox"/> IEP or <input type="checkbox"/> 504 Identified Disability:		Case Manager:
Parent/Guardian #1:	Parent/Guardian #2:	
Phone:	Phone:	
Email:	Email:	
BTAM Team Lead/Case Manager:		

This protocol does not predict future violence nor is it a foolproof method of assessing an individual's or group's risk of harm to others. This protocol is not a checklist that can be quantified. It is a guide designed to assist in the inquiry/investigation of potential danger (identify circumstances and risk factors that may increase risk for potential youth aggression) and to assist districts in development of a threat assessment and management plan. Furthermore, as circumstances change, so too does risk potential; therefore, if you are reviewing this protocol at a date after assessment completion, be mindful of supervision, intervention, and the passage of time.

INCIDENT DETAILS THAT INITIATED FULL ASSESSMENT:

Date of Incident: _____ Time: _____

Description of Incident (*include specific behavior/comments heard or reported*):

Location: school property: specify: _____ school bus school sponsored activity other:

Threat Type: suspicious behavior stalking assault physical sexual
 harassment suicidal/self-harm other:

Mode: in-person text email letter social media internet other:

Demonstrates: risk factors warning signs escalating patterns of behavior

Motive: no known reason to act on plan at this time possible reasons due to recent circumstances
 definite triggers or events that would make student likely to act now

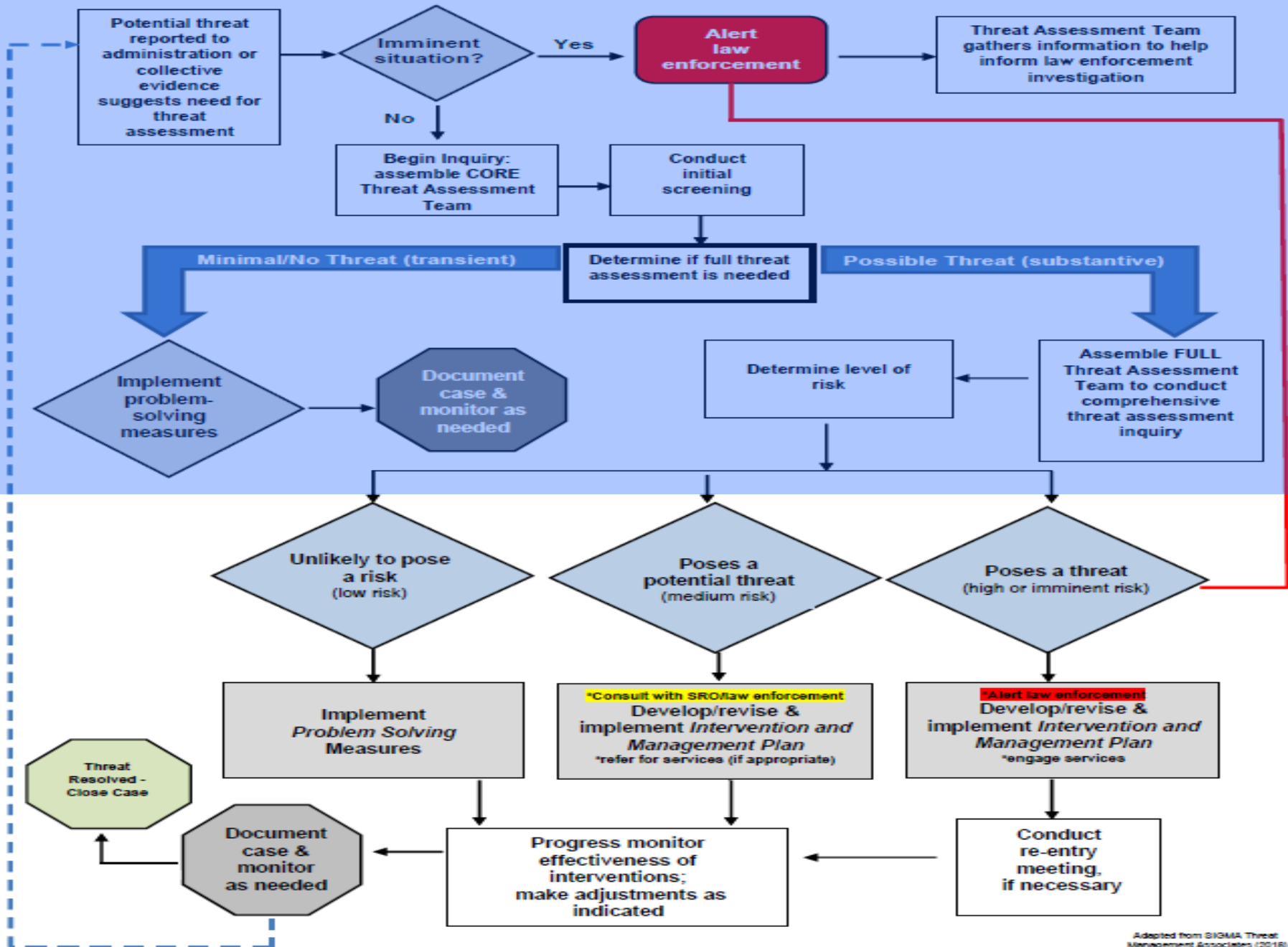
Potential Targets: another student school staff group school community other:

Referral Source: another student school staff parent community member tip line/phone call
 other:

Additional Information:

Reason for FULL Assessment: (Describe cause for concern that student may pose a continued threat. If screener was completed, please attach/submit with this document.)

Threat Assessment and Management Process



Secret Service Threat Assessment Model



- Focuses on the facts of a specific case
- Examines the progression of ideas and planning behavior over time
- Corroborates information through multiple sources.
- Cased on three guiding principles....

Principles to Avoid Misuse

- Do no harm
 - Keep information confidential and *use signs to identify the need for interventions, rather than as a punishment tool.*
- Many students show multiple risk factors - important not to overreact.
- Avoid stereotypes and labeling.
 - Focus on behaviors
- View student behavior within a developmental context.
 - Developmentally typical behavior should not be misinterpreted

Adapted from Dwyer, Osher, & Warger (1998)



THE FINAL REPORT AND
FINDINGS OF THE
SAFE SCHOOL
INITIATIVE:

IMPLICATIONS FOR
THE PREVENTION OF
SCHOOL ATTACKS IN
THE UNITED STATES

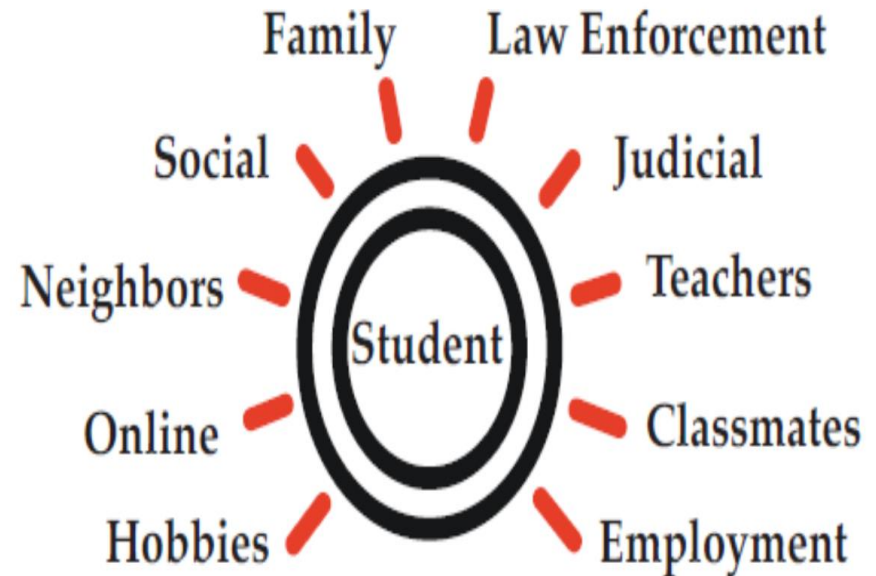
UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE AND
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON, D. C.
May 2002



Secret Service Threat Assessment Model

- Data Collection
 - group achievement test scores
 - test scores
 - attendance records
 - frequent moves/transfer records
 - discipline records
 - language proficiency status
 - school history
 - academic, behavioral, disciplinary, and mental health
 - academic and activity settings
 - reports from teachers, school support staff, and coaches/mentors
 - history of parent involvement



Contextual Assessment

Violence is interaction between....

Subject

- person of concern
- how individual perceives and deals with life
- intensity of effort directed towards planning/preparation

Target

- identified target
- persons fearful?

Environment

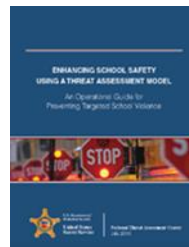
- circumstances/situations affecting subject
- external influences encouraging/discourage violence

Precipitating Events

- positive (protective) or negative impact that accelerates risk

Investigative Themes

1. Motives
2. Communications
3. Inappropriate interests
4. Weapons access
5. Stressors
6. Emotional & developmental issues
8. Desperation or despair
9. Violence as an option
10. Others concerned
11. Capacity to carry out
12. Planning
13. Consistency
14. Protective Factors



Secret Service Threat Assessment Model

11 key areas* to assess/explore during interviews and data gathering

1. Possible/perceived stressors; circumstances
2. Thoughts of revenge/communication of intent
3. Inappropriate interest/experiences/fascination with violence
4. History of attitudes toward violence as acceptable
5. Depression, helplessness, hopelessness and/or despair
6. Suicidal ideation/intent
7. Homicidal ideation/intent
8. Motivations/goals/capacity for violence
9. Mental health concerns/psychiatric disorders
10. Possible helping resources/others concerned
11. “Story” consistent with actions

**11 Key Questions*



Assessing Risk

T ime	Has the time to execute their plan; if time imperative, immediate containment is needed
O ppportunity	Has the opportunity to carry-out plan; is able to access targets
A bility	Cognitive and physical capabilities to carry-out plan
D esire	Strong desire to carry-out plan and sees no other option besides violence
S timulus	Stressors are negatively impacting life and decision making, thus can be a trigger for carrying out the harmful act

- Vortex of Information

*Dangerousness is not a permanent state of being
nor solely an attribute of a person.*

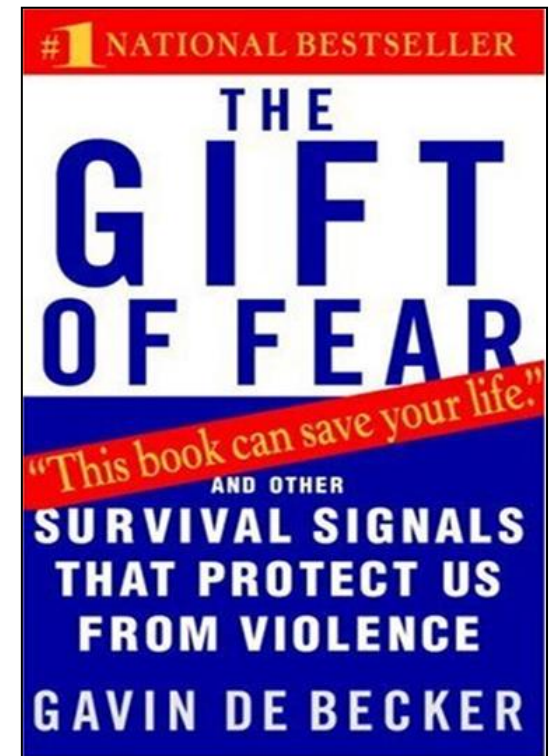
Dangerousness is **situational** & based
on:

Justification

Alternatives

Consequences; and

Ability



Interview with Person of Concern

Goals:

- Gather information about the grievance, motivations, plans, identity of additional interview contacts
- Assess risk factors, warning signs, stressors, resiliency
- Redirect person of concern away from known targets and violence
- Offer appropriate assistance
- Deliver admonishments against future negative behaviors
- Serve as an effective deterrent (behavior has been noticed)

Interviews with Others

- For family and/or friends:
 - Has the student at risk told you of any ideas or plan to commit a violent act against the school?
 - Against any specific person(s)? If so, describe these ideas/plans.
 - Has he or she taken any steps to act on these ideas/plans?
- For school staff, family and/or friends:
 - How organized is the student at risk?
 - How capable do you think he/she is of acting on his/her ideas?
 - How concerned do you think staff and family should be about the safety of the target(s)?

Interviews with Others

For identified target:

- How well do you know the student at risk of violence?
- How well does this person know your work and personal lifestyle patterns?
- What changes could make an attack less likely?
- How seriously do you take this threat of potential attack?
- How concerned are you about your safety?
 - It is infrequent (less than 25% of cases) for direct threats to be made to the intended victims.

Risk Factors/Threat Enhancers

- Social withdrawal
- Isolation, alienation
- Feelings of rejection
- Victim of violence & bullying
- Feelings of being picked on & persecuted
- Low school interest & performance
- Violent expressions in writings and drawings
- Uncontrolled anger
- Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying
- History of discipline problems
- History of violence
- Intolerance & prejudice
- Drug & alcohol use
- Affiliation with gangs
- Access & possession of firearms
- Serious threats of violence

More Recent Events: hallucinations, delusions; social isolation

+ Stressors:

- Significant losses
- Significant disappointments
- Having been bullied
- Associated coping failure

Warning Behaviors

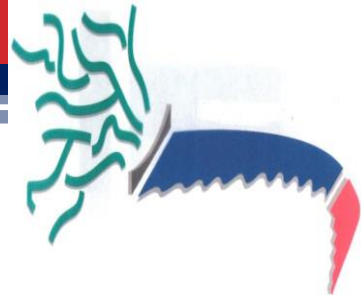
Distal

- Personal grievance & moral outrage
- Framed by ideology
- Failure to affiliate
- Dependence on the virtual community
- Thwarting of occupational goals
- Changes in thinking and emotion
- Relationship challenges
- Mental health disorder*
- History of criminal violence

Proximal

- **Pathway**
- **Fixation**
- **Identification**
- **Novel aggression**
- **Last resort warning behaviors**

IMMINENT WARNING SIGNS



- Suicidal ideation and behaviors
- Gun use/purchase/possession
- Interest in violence
- Hopelessness and despair
- A need for revenge
- Serious physical fighting with peers or family members
- Severe destruction of property
- Severe rage for seemingly minor reasons
- Detailed threats of lethal violence
- *“Leakage” – telling friends, warning others, recruiting others, school assignments*
- *Postings on social media sites*

*These factors MAY signal that a youth is considering acting on thoughts of violence

Social Media Landscape



4. Organize and Analyze Information

Pathway to Violence

Intensity of Effort

Implementation

**Preparation/
Acquisition**

Planning

Ideation

- Means
- Method
- Opportunity
- Proximity



Secret Service Threat Assessment Model

Organize/Analyze 11 key questions to help determine risk:

1. What are the person'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 person shown any inappropriate interest in school attacks/attackers, weapons, incidents of mass violence?
4. Has the person engaged in attack-related behaviors?
5. Does the person have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?
6. Is the person experiencing hopelessness, desperation, and/or despair?



Secret Service Threat Assessment Model

Organize/Analyze 11 key questions to help determine risk:

7. Does the person have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?
8. Does the person see violence as an acceptable, desirable – or the only – way to solve a problem?
9. Are the person's conversation and "story" consistent with his or her actions?
10. Are other people concerned about the person's potential for violence?
11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood the person will engage in violence / resort to violence?



Two Types of Violence

Predatory/Planned

- Premeditated
- Often emotionless
- Serves a purpose/goal
- Often have grievance
- Attack oriented
- Not time limited



Impulsive/Reactive

- Emotional
- Impromptu
- Frequently a defensive behavior to perceived imminent threat
- Reactions are time-limited



**adult and adolescent mass murders are mostly predatory/planned*

Analysis: Psychopathic Indicators

- ❑ Narcissistic - no conscience; sadistic
 - lack capacity for empathy, remorse, guilt
- No regard for social norms, morality, ethics, law
 - Dislike for those who represent authority
- Inability to take responsibility for own behavior
 - Blame victims and paint self as “good guy”
 - Punishment seen as injustice – feel they are being wronged
- Good at “*impression management*”
 - Charming, witty, charismatic
- Want to be “Godlike”
 - Don’t care if they hurt others; often experience euphoria when doing so
- Impervious to fear – nothing fazes them...yet
 - Narcissism is fragile, hypersensitive to any perceived slight (paranoid)
- Feel justified in killing those who rejected, failed, or frustrated quest to fulfill desire
- 29% of secondary school shooters

Analysis: Psychotic or Complex MH Challenges

- Avoidant; schizotypal and dependent personality traits
- Schizophrenia - paranoid delusions, auditory hallucinations
- Depressed and full of rage
- 29% of secondary school shooters

-In adult mass murders, severe mental illness is observed in higher rates (US Dept. of Justice/FBI, 2017) along with a complex combination of mental disorders and personality disorders

(Meloy, 2013)

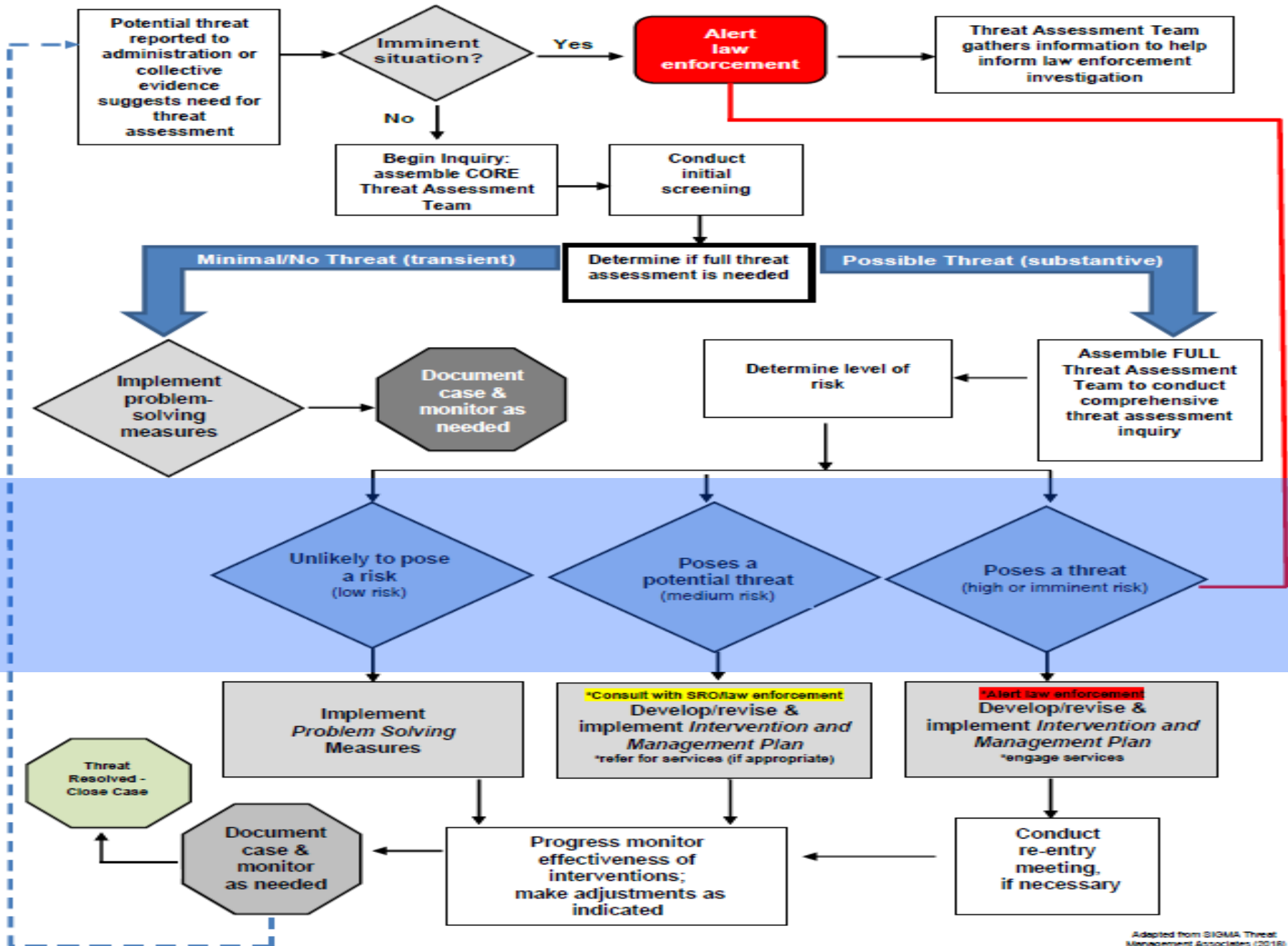
Analysis: Traumatized

- Some sexually abused
- Suffered emotional and physical abuse at home
- Ongoing stress and losses
 - parental substance abuse
 - frequent move
 - lost parent to separation, jail and death
 - trauma history resulted in suicidal thoughts
- ACE's = Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Most common type of secondary school shooters (42%)

Analysis  ***Helps Directs Intervention***

5. Determine Level of Risk/Concern

Threat Assessment and Management Process



Levels of Risk/Concern

Low	Moderate	High/Imminent
Implausible, vague, indirect, lacks detail	Plausible but lacks specifics	Plausible; direct and/or specific
Inconsistent and/or no intent; passing thought in the moment	Suggests some thought how would carry out plan	Detailed thought as to how would carrying out plan
Lack realism	Realistic and indication of time, place, and/or targets but no detailed plan	Realistic and actions indicate strong intent to carry out
No identifiable grievances; is remorseful	Some grievances identified; does not view as hopeless/helpless	Strong grievance identified; intent on violence as solution
Content and actions suggest no movement towards carrying out; no “true” threat	No to minimal indication of preparatory steps; if minimize stressors unlikely to carry out	Strong intent to carry-out regardless; acquiring and/or practicing
Supports available; willing to problem solve	Willing to access supports, seek help, and problem solve	Minimal to no supports; resistive to problem solving/interventions

2 Questions to Interventions

1. Subject pose a threat of violence? (i.e. moderate, high, imminent risk)?
2. Need additional interventions, and on-going supports and engagement for a period of time, to mitigate risk, decrease stressors, and build protective factors?

If “NO” to both then low risk:

If “NO ”to both (i.e. low risk) then:

- Document the BTAM process followed and actions taken to resolve the concern
- If the subject shows a need for help or intervention, such as mental health care, then provide the subject/subject’s family with appropriate referrals and document.
- Close the case

2 Questions to Guide Intervention

1. If “YES” to one or both questions then:

- Take appropriate actions
- Develop an intervention and monitoring plan, appropriate for level of risk
- Provide the subject/subject’s family with appropriate mental health referrals
- Document the case, including referrals made

If responses are unclear  ***develop monitoring and support plan.***

School-Based Intervention: **Imminent Risk**

- ***Needs immediate containment***: mental health hold or law enforcement intervention
 - If the student has the means to carry out the harmful act, determine if will voluntarily relinquish it. **Do not force the student to do so or place self in danger. Call SRO.**
- Supervise constantly and without exception until help arrives.
- Under no circumstances allow the student to leave the school.
- Do not agree to keep a student's intentions a secret.
- Then follow high risk protocol interventions
- Protect and notify intended victims and their guardians (if warranted)

School-Based Intervention: **High Risk**

- Contact and consult with SRO/law enforcement/mental health
- Notify guardian/parents – work collaboratively
 - Guardian uncooperative/unavailable – contact law enforcement/child protective services
- Follow discipline procedures as per conduct code and/or refer for mental health assessment/engagement
- Develop intervention, supervision and monitoring plan
- Establish re-entry meeting date
- Conduct progress monitoring – engage teachers/support staff
- Protect and notify intended victims and their guardians (if warranted)

always discuss with parents so they have a better understanding of possible interventions and reintegration

School-Based Intervention: **Moderate Risk**

- Notify guardian/parents – work collaboratively
 - Guardian uncooperative/unavailable – contact law enforcement/child protective services; *document!*
- Develop intervention, supervision, and monitoring plan
 - Consult with SRO
- Make appropriate referrals - school-based and community supports
- Protect and notify intended victims and their guardians (if warranted)
- Conduct progress monitoring – engage teachers/support staff
- Keep regular contact with parents and other providers

School-Based Intervention: **Low Risk**

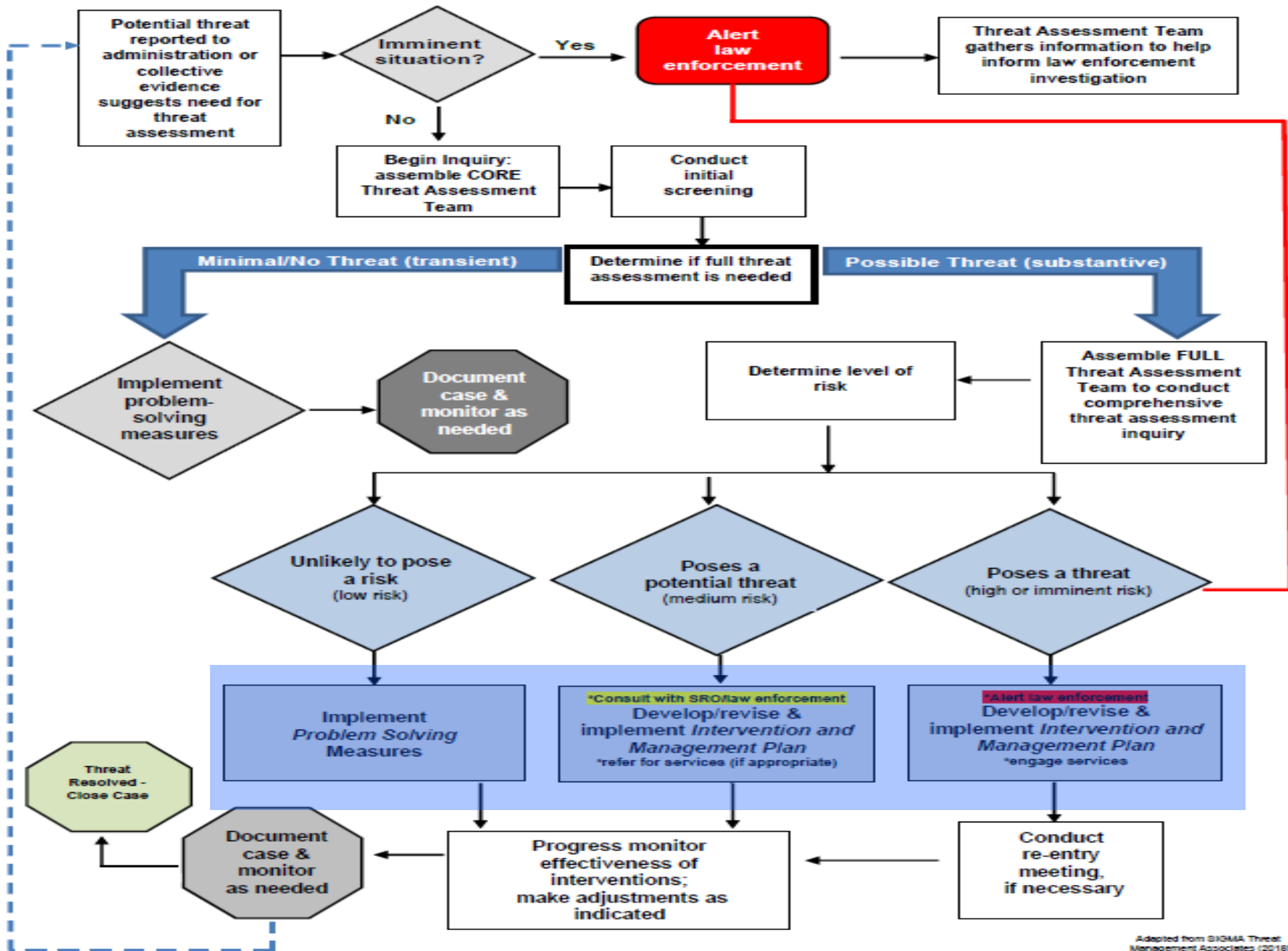
- See that perceived threat is resolved through explanation, apology, or making amends
- Notify parents, engage in monitoring/supports
- Identify potential school-based supports
- Connect parents with community mental health services, if appropriate
- Engage teachers/staff to monitor and support

Informing the Parents

- Must inform parents/guardians
- Document phone call/meeting
- Evaluate and document parents response
- Parents refuse to acknowledge homicidal suicidal thoughts/actions
 - Threat – call police
 - Suicide - can report as medical neglect
- Police may take legal custody, protective custody, or custody with an involuntary mental health hold
- Transfer of responsibility
- Should still inform parent if feel threat is not serious
 - Actively seek additional information

6. Develop Intervention & Monitoring Plan

Threat Assessment and Management Process



Responding to Risk

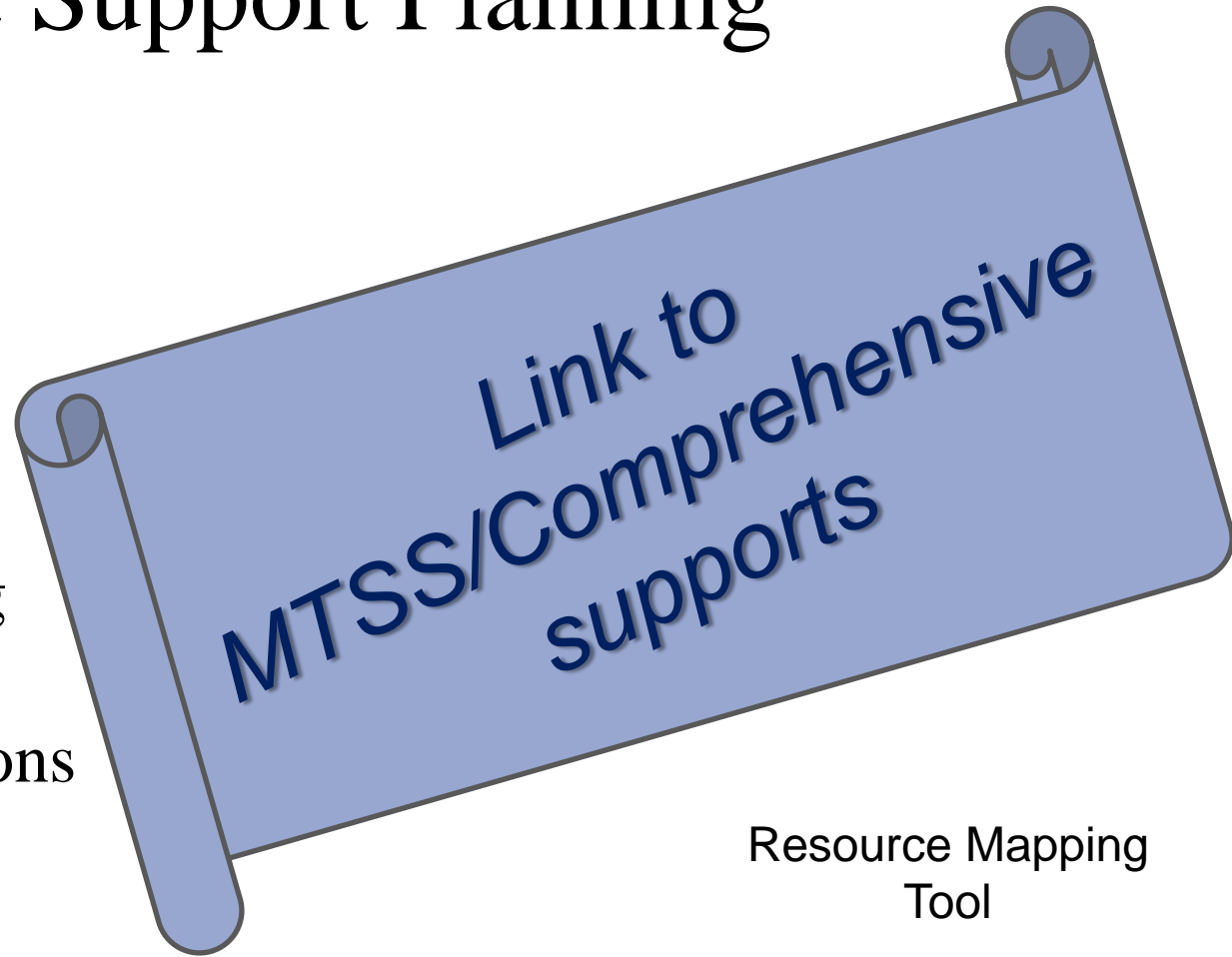
- Develop interventions that include increased supervision and supports
- Obtain parental permission to exchange information with providers
 - consider wrap-around intervention and support
- Consider establishing/revising student's behavior contract and/or to conduct a more in-depth assessment.

STEP: Case Management

S	De-escalate, contain, or control the subject who may take violent action
T	Decrease vulnerabilities of the target
E	Modify the physical and cultural environment and systems to discourage escalation
P	Prepare for and mitigate against precipitating events that can trigger escalation

Intervention & Support Planning

- Discipline
- Monitoring
- Skill Development
- Resiliency Building
- Relationship Building
- Environment
- Additional Interventions



Resource Mapping
Tool

***PUNISHMENT ALONE DOES NOT CHANGE
BEHAVIOR!!***

Discipline Considerations

- Prosocial discipline (restorative justice, community service, mentoring...)
- Removing privileges
- Identify triggers and self
 - initiate “cool-down”
 - time/location
- Letter of Apology
- Conflict Resolution
- Confrontation/warning
- Restorative Practice
- Behavior Contract
- Parent Meeting
- Suspension
- Expulsion
- Alternative to Suspension
- Alternative placement
- Habitually Disruptive
- Detention
- No contact order
- Ticketing, charges, courts, probation
- Court issues protective orders
- Diversion program
- Incarceration

OVERLY PUNITIVE MEASURES AND/OR THOSE THAT LACK COMPASSION CAN ESCALATE RISK!

Monitoring Measures

- On-going progress monitoring
- Check-in/check-out
- Late arrival/early dismissal
- Random searches
- Safety contracts
- Track attendance
- Modify schedules (reduce free, unsupervised time; travel card)
- Restrictions
- “No contact” agreements
- Escorts from class to class
- Community agency involvement
- Ongoing communication/ collaboration between staff, parents, and others
- Home visits (check for weapons, etc.)
- Parents increase supervision
- Probation, parole, tracker, ankle monitors
- Increased monitoring
- Review student’s response to monitoring
- Fade monitoring as appropriate

Skill Development & Relat. Building

Help redirect emotions/motives:

- Implement prevention & intervention programs
 - ***SEL (Social-Emotional Learning)***
- Direct teaching of skills (anger management, conflict resolution, social skills)
- Academic interventions/supports/accommodations
- Changes of placement to *access* additional resources
- FBA/BIP
- School and/or community supports
- Peer supports
- Participation in school activities/clubs
- Mentoring
- Family resources
- Mental health interventions
- Drug/alcohol intervention
- Special education as appropriate
- Revise IEP/504
- De-escalation training for staff/parents

Environment

- Address systemic, procedural, or policy problems that may serve as precipitating events
- Build a caring and supportive climate and culture
- Ensure positive dynamics among staff (serves as modeling for students)
- Implement effective threat and suicide assessment procedures
- Enhance social-emotional learning to include:
 - Bullying prevention
 - Violence prevention
 - Suicide prevention
 - Emotional regulation
 - Conflict management
- Give permission to “Break the Code of Silence” and get help for a peer who is struggling

Relationship Building

- Establish system for student to seek support proactively from an adult
- Peer mentor
- Adult mentor
- Increase engagement in school and/or community activities
- Provide feedback and mentoring
- Engage in leadership activities
- De-escalation training for staff
- Decrease isolation
- Monitor reactions to grievances, precipitating events and provide supports



Additional Interventions

- Revise IEP/504 Plan
- Intervention team referral
- Change in transportation
- Evaluation
 - psychiatric/psychological
 - special education
- Change of placement to access more intensive services
- McKinney-Vento/foster care referral
- Social service referral

Threat Assessments are NOT Manifestation Determination Reviews

MDR's	TA's
focus on the student's special ed. needs and services as it relates to a specific event	review the student's patterns of dangerous behaviors and the school's past interventions
determine whether or not a student's specific act was a manifestation of the student's identified area of disability	determine the level of concern regarding a student's overall pattern of behavior
may lead to changes in service/placement or to expulsion hearing	focus on <i>preventative planning</i> in a specific setting to reduce risk

Threat Assessments are NOT Expulsion Hearings

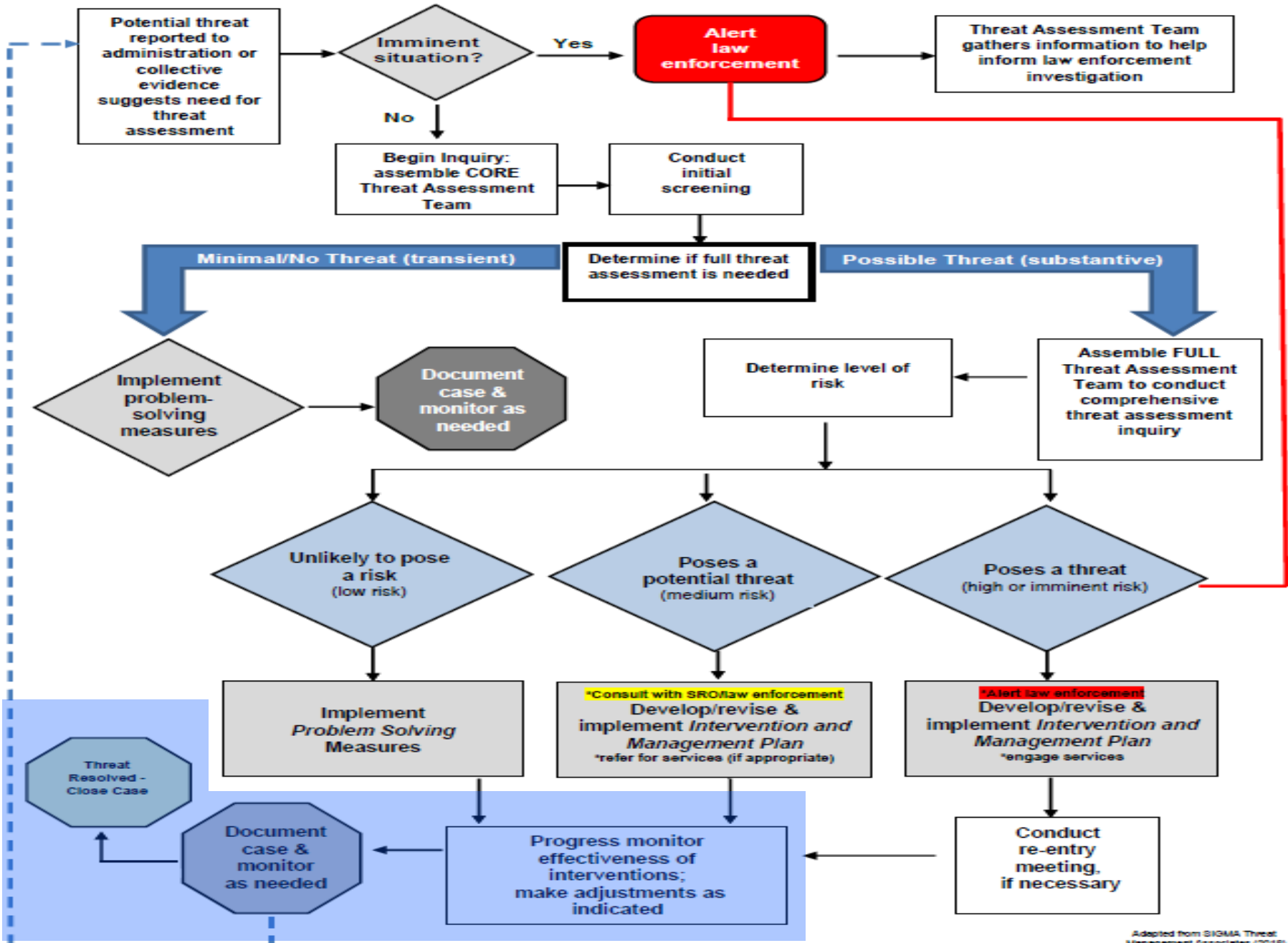
Expulsion Hearing	Threat Assessments
determine whether or not a specific behavior violated school policy	assess levels of concern regarding a student's pattern of behavior over time
determine whether or not a student should be expelled	lead to <i>preventative</i> planning for safety in a specific placement to reduce risk

Environmental Management

- Assess and enhance positive school and workplace climate and culture
- Address systemic, policy or procedural problems that may serve as triggering conditions
- Bullying/violence prevention programs
- Positive behavior/multi-tiered systems of supports
- Intervene with others that support violent behavior
- Reduce stressors/triggers
- Enhance conflict management skills
- Reinforce reporting procedures

7. Document

Threat Assessment and Management Process



Documentation & Follow-Up

- Provide appropriate postvention response
- If out of school, need to conduct re-entry meeting
- DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT!!!!
 - Fair
 - Objective
 - Reasonable
 - Timely



Documentation

- Fill out screening and full assessment forms – should be used by every school
- Serve as documentation process was followed and interventions being offered
- Can also write a more in-depth report and integrate other data (i.e. BASC, FBA/BIP, specific responses to interview questions...)
- Used by every school
- Copy kept at school and also send to district office
 - Centralized database

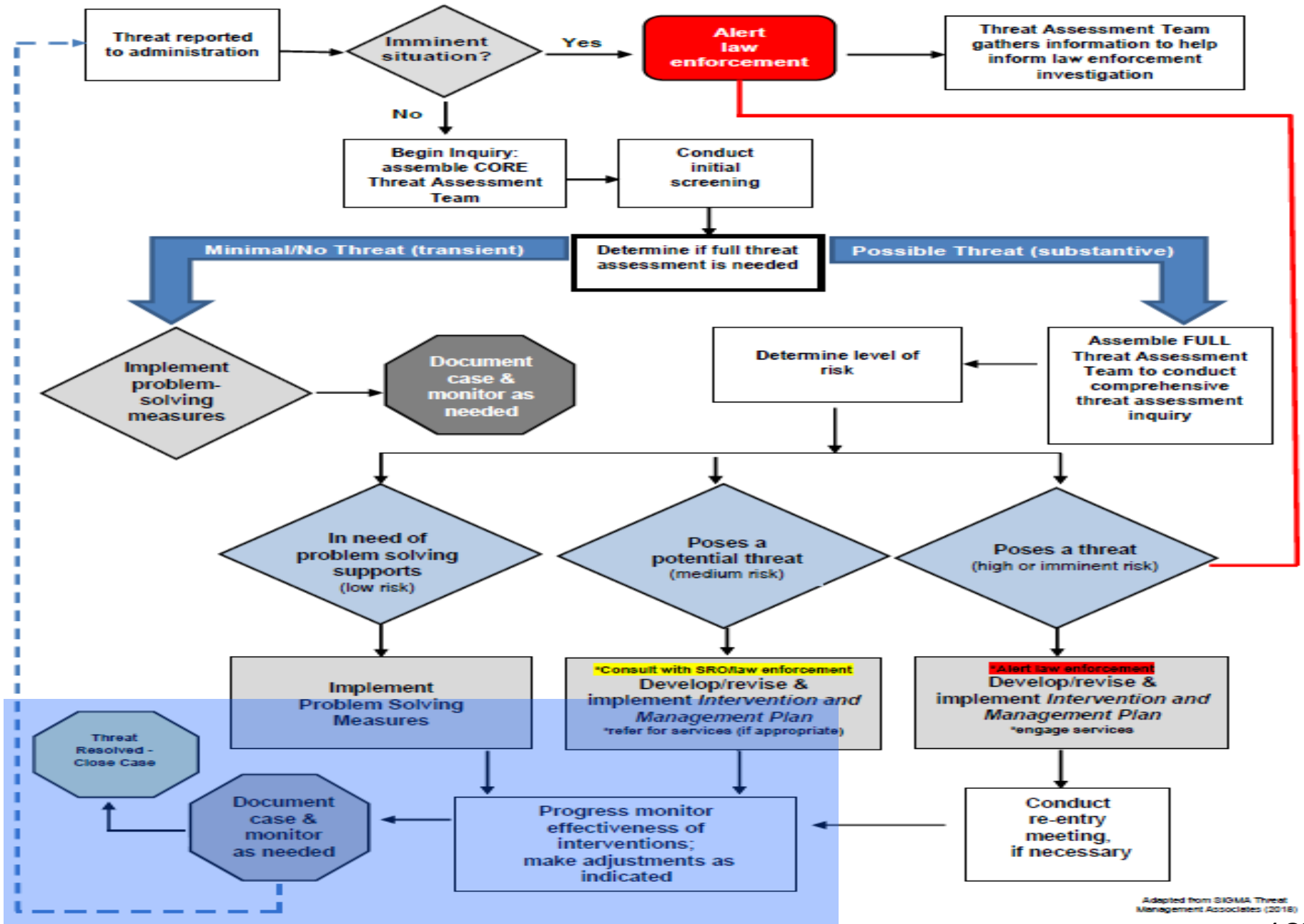


We can make a positive difference!

8. Progress Monitor

-Stay engaged

Threat Assessment and Management Process



Progress Monitor

- Assign “case manager”
- Determine:
 - interventions to be monitored
 - how will document
 - progress monitoring frequency
 - data to be collected
 - define “success” = close case

Implementation & Communication



Communication with Key Stakeholders

- Parents
 - recognizing and reporting problematic behaviors
 - procedures and protocols
 - suspension and expulsion can increase risk!
 - BTAM is an intervention and support process!
- School Board
 - procedures and protocols
- Law Enforcement
 - include representation when developing procedures and protocols
- Community
 - prevention and response efforts
 - liaise with community agencies to identify supports
 - list of community resources
 - proactively engage in relationship building with community providers (i.e. ER staff, community mental health, pediatricians, etc.)

Challenges & Opportunities

- Time
 - Allocate adequate time to complete assessment and safety plan
 - Delegate responsibilities to team members
 - Make use of time for PD to train staff/team members
- Resources
 - Adjust schedule to capitalize on human resources
 - Incorporate into job descriptions
 - Team with other school districts/teams to “share the load”
 - Take advantage of free and low cost training opportunities
- Uncooperative Parents
 - Be assertive about safety planning
 - Provide options when available
 - Hold fast to procedures and protocols (and communicate these to parents)
 - Control what you can control

Evaluating Fidelity of Implementation

- Develop and review checklists and flow charts to ensure fidelity to established protocols and procedures
- Clearly define roles and expectations for all team members
- Assign one person to manage documentation (hard copies, electronic logs, etc.)
- Schedule regular follow-up meetings and reviews for individual students
- Schedule regular follow up meetings and reviews for the system and teams



School Safety and Crisis

Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM): Best Practice Considerations for K-12 Schools

Behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) is a fact-based, systematic process designed to identify, assess, and manage potential dangerous or violent situations. School safety experts, law enforcement officials, and the United States Department of Education, Justice, Secret Service, and Federal Bureau of Investigation (2017, 2018) have cited research indicating that before a student commits an act of violence in a school campus, warning signs are usually evident. Research and best practice guidelines provided by these entities also indicate a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to behavioral threat assessment and management can identify effective interventions and supports that mitigate a potential threat and help the process to proceed in a more positive pathway.

Research has also shown that when BTAM is implemented according to best practices and implemented with fidelity, students on which a threat assessment has been completed are more likely to receive counseling services and a parent conference and less likely to accept long-term suspension or an alternative placement (Cassell et al., 2017). Furthermore, research has also shown that when implemented correctly, an discipline-free threat assessment process may reflect a commitment to school suspension, school transfer, or long-term care. A threat assessment process may reflect a commitment to school suspension, school transfer, or long-term care. A threat assessment process may reflect a commitment to school suspension, school transfer, or long-term care. A threat assessment process may reflect a commitment to school suspension, school transfer, or long-term care.

COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORTS

Threat assessment is most effective when embedded within a comprehensive system of supports (CIS) that actively encourages collaborative partnerships focusing on prevention. A Framework for Safe and Sound Schools (Cowan et al., 2013) identifies best practices for establishing safe and successful schools utilizing CIS. This framework can help to identify students before they come to the attention of law enforcement and also identify students in need of additional supports. The outcomes of an effective BTAM process can lead to an increase in school engagement services (e.g., mentoring programs, mental health services, the utilization of support services of place (e.g., Individualized Education Program (IEP), 504 plan, functional behavioral assessment, behavior intervention plan, and its engagement in a problem-solving process. The goal is to focus on providing interventions and supports, and not punishment. This positive orientation can be achieved by focusing on providing interventions and supports, and not punishment. This positive orientation can be achieved by focusing on providing interventions and supports, and not punishment. This positive orientation can be achieved by focusing on providing interventions and supports, and not punishment.

LEGAL AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES

An increased number of cases have posed questions that require the establishment of a threat assessment process. In addition, multiple governmental agencies have recommended that schools establish threat assessment procedures, and teams (e.g., U.S. Department of Education, Justice, Homeland Security, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center).



National Association of School Psychologists

Virtual Threat Assessment Resources

Behavior Threat Assessment and Management in the Virtual Environment

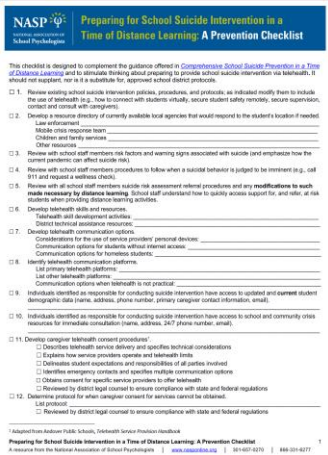
- <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid-19-resource-center>

Handling Threat Assessment Cases Remotely

SIGMA Threat Management Associates

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4AtiXRRlww>

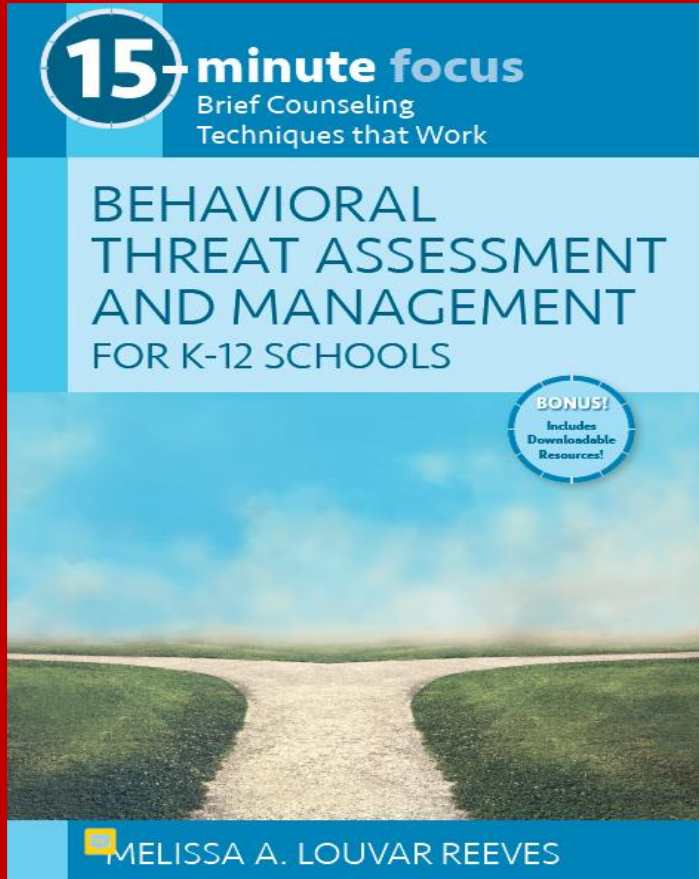
Virtual Suicide Resources



<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid-19-resource-center>

National Association of School Psychologists

- *Comprehensive School Suicide Prevention in a Time of Distance Learning*
- *Preparing for Virtual School Suicide Risk Assessments*
- *Conducting a Virtual Suicide Risk Assessment*
- *And many other COVID-19 related resources!*



15-Minute Focus Series

- <https://ncyi.org/shop/landingpages/15-minute-focus-series/#:~:text=15%2DMinute%20Focus%20is%20a,Budget%20Constraints%20for%20Ongoing%20Training>
- Also includes:
 - *Anxiety*
 - *Suicide*
 - *Trauma*
 - *Grief*
 - *Counseling Techniques*
 - *And more coming...*

Practitioner Friendly: Administrators, Teachers,
School Mental Health Professionals, Support
Staff, and Parents

\$12.95-17.95

SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT (BTAM): Best Practices for K-12 Schools

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