

POLICY

2003

5685
1 of 3

NON-INSTRUCTIONAL/BUSINESS
OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE

The objective of the “Safe School Initiative” is an attempt to identify information that could be obtainable, or that could help prevent an act of violence. Key features are to focus on “targeted” school violence by identifying individuals who may have intent; assessing whether the individual poses a risk; and managing the threat the individual poses. This is known as “threat assessment” and the goal of threat assessment is to intervene before an attack can occur.

Threat assessment should be looked upon as one component in an overall strategy to reduce school violence. The principle objective of school-violence reduction strategies should be to create a culture and climate of safety, respect, and emotional support within our schools.

Our school settings should support a climate of safety where adults and students respect each other and communication between adults and students is encouraged and supported. Administrators and teachers should pay attention to students’ social and emotional needs. Each student should feel that there is an adult to whom he/she can turn to for support and advice.

The primary purpose of a threat assessment is to prevent targeted violence. Six principles form the foundation of the threat assessment process. These principles are:

1. Targeted violence is the end result of an understandable, and oftentimes discernable, process of thinking and behavior.
2. Targeted violence stems from an interaction among the individual, the situation, the setting, and the target.
3. An investigative, skeptical, inquisitive mindset is critical to successful threat assessment.
4. Effective threat assessment is based upon facts, rather than on characteristics or “traits”.
5. An “integrated system approach” should guide threat assessment inquiries and investigations.
6. 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.

Early Warning Signs – It is not always possible to predict behavior that will lead to violence. However, educators and parents, and sometimes students, can recognize certain early warning signs. None of these signs alone is sufficient for predicting aggression and violence. Rather, the early warning signs are offered only as an aid in identifying and referring children who may need help:

- Social withdrawal – feelings of depression, rejection, persecution, unworthiness or lack of confidence.
- Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone – troubled, withdrawn, or having internal issues.
- Excessive feelings of rejection – isolated from their mentally healthy peers.
- Being a victim of violence – physical or sexual abuse.
- Feelings of being picked on and persecuted – teased, bullied, singled out for ridicule and humiliated at home or at school.

(Continued)

POLICY

2003

5685
2 of 3

NON-INSTRUCTIONAL/BUSINESS
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- Low school interest and poor academic performance.
- Expression of violence in writings and drawings.
- Uncontrolled anger – anger that is expressed frequently and intensely.
- Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying behavior.
- History of discipline problems – in school or at home.
- Past history of violent and aggressive behavior – age of onset may be a key factor in interpreting early warning signs; stealing, vandalism, lying, cheating, and fire setting.
- Intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes – racial, ethnic, religious, language, gender, sexual orientation, ability and physical appearance.
- Drug use and alcohol use.
- Affiliation with gangs.
- Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms.
- Serious threats of violence – a detailed and specific threat to use violence.

Imminent Warning Signs – Unlike early warning signs, imminent warning signs indicate that a student is very close to behavior that is potentially dangerous to self and/or others:

- Serious physical fighting with peers or family members.
- Severe destruction of property.
- Severe rage for seemingly minor reason.
- Detailed threats of lethal violence.
- Possession and/or use of firearm and other weapons.
- Other self-injurious behaviors or threats of suicide.

Pro-active planning is a critical element in the implementation of a school threat assessment program. Therefore, school administrators are directed to create a multi-disciplinary threat assessment team that is based in the school. The roles and responsibilities of the team as a whole, and members of that team individually, shall be clearly defined. The information gathering and assessment procedures to be used by the team should be formalized. Team members should be trained together in the threat process. The multi-disciplinary threat assessment team's principle responsibility is to guide the assessment and management of situations of concern. A senior administrator shall chair the team. Regular members of the team should include: 1) a respected member of the school faculty or administration; 2) an law enforcement investigator such as a School Resource Officer; 3) a mental health professional; and 4) other professionals, such as guidance counselors, teachers, coaches, and others who may be able to contribute to the threat assessment process.

There is much students can do to help create safe schools such as talk to their teachers, parents, and counselors to find out how they can get involved and do their part to make their school safe. Here are some ideas:

(Continued)

POLICY

2003

5685
3 of 3

NON-INSTRUCTIONAL/BUSINESS
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- Listen to your friends if they share troubling feelings or thoughts. Encourage them to get help from a trusted adult either in school or out. If you are concerned, seek help for them. Share your concerns with your parents or other adults in or out of school.
- Create, join, or support student organizations that promote safety and non-violence.
- Work with local businesses and community groups to organize youth-oriented activities that help young people think of ways to prevent school and community violence.
- Organize an assembly and invite adults from within the school and out and sit down with other students to share ideas about how to deal with violence, intimidation, and bullying.
- Get involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating your school's violence prevention and response plan.
- Participate in violence prevention programs such as peer mediation and conflict resolution.
- Work with your teachers and administrators to create a safe process for reporting threats, intimidation, weapon possession, drug selling, gang activity, graffiti, and vandalism. Use the process.
- Help to develop and participate in activities that promote student understanding of differences and that respect the rights of others.
- Volunteer to be a mentor for younger students and/or provide tutoring to your peers.
- Know your school's code of conduct and model responsible behavior. Avoid being part of a crowd that is known to be violent.
- Be a role model – take responsibility by reacting to anger without physically or verbally harming others.
- Seek help from your parents or a trusted adult if you are experiencing intense feelings of anger, fear, anxiety, or depression.

Developing a strategy to prevent and respond to potential incidents of targeted school violence is a challenging and complex task. There is no single, universal strategy that will be effective in dealing with every situation or crisis that will confront our school personnel. When a student's behavior raises the specter of potential violence, responsible adults will be forced to make judgments about the risk associated with that student's actions and how to respond to that threatening situation. The threat assessment process is rooted in the preposition that each situation of concern should be viewed and assessed individually and that targeted violence is the end result of a discernible process.

Adopted: 4/28/03