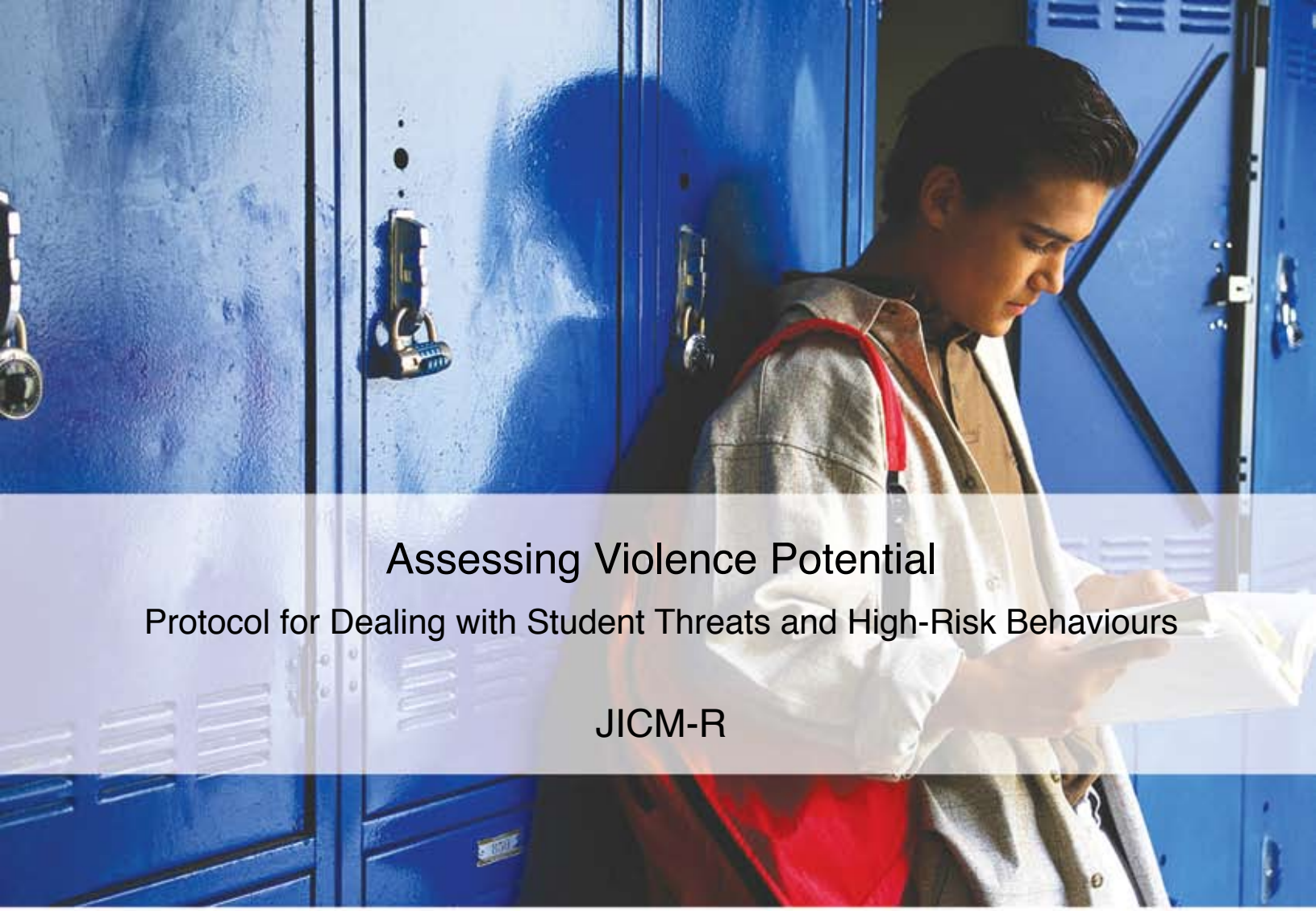

Assessing Violence Potential

Protocol for Dealing with Student Threats and High-Risk Behaviours

JICM-R

St. James-Assiniboia School Division

Great Schools for Growing and Learning
www.sjds.net

Assessing Violence Potential

Protocol for Dealing with Student Threats and High-Risk Behaviours

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January, 2009

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Introduction

Purpose

High profile school shootings in Canada and the United States, as well as terrorist attacks and other high profile violent traumas, have understandably increased anxiety among many students, staff, parents and others in our community. Without formal procedures in schools and communities to assess high risk and threat making behaviour, the likelihood of over-reacting or under-reacting is increased.

This protocol was developed to assist in creating and maintaining an environment where students, staff, parents and others feel safe. The primary purpose of the Threat Assessment protocol is to assist multidisciplinary threat assessment teams to identify indicators that suggest a student may be moving on a pathway towards violence against him/herself or others. This protocol will assist teams to intervene to decrease that risk, prevent injury, and support the student in receiving the help he or she needs to address the issues contributing to the high-risk behaviour. Threat assessment teams, established in each school, will ensure that appropriate support is provided to those against whom threats have been made and shall notify staff and parents as required.

Need for Training

School based threat assessment teams shall receive training on a regular basis to ensure consistent use of the protocol to help maintain safe school environments. This protocol is to be used by multidisciplinary teams who are adequately trained in the theory and practice of student threat/risk assessment obtained by participating in Level 1 Threat/Risk Assessment training or some other suitable training program.

Importance of a Safe School Culture

Pro-social school programs and/or safe school culture are imperative and the only way to effectively reduce school violence. Healthy, safe school cultures offer students clearly articulated proactive and pro-social standards of conduct to which all parties are held accountable. Environments of positive interactions and social responsibility are actively promoted and valued in our schools. It is critical for students themselves to be actively involved in the development of safe school initiatives and programming.

Composition and Function of a Threat Assessment Team

The Threat Assessment Teams (TAT) are multidisciplinary teams trained to identify students and situations that would cause students to potentially traumatize their school through violence, threats of violence, or other disruptive behaviours. Team members are also trained to intervene in a proactive way to eliminate or minimize the negative impact these behaviours could have on students, staff, parents and community.

There are two stages in the threat assessment process, outlined as follows:

The first stage is an initial response and the primary function is data collection and immediate risk reducing intervention.

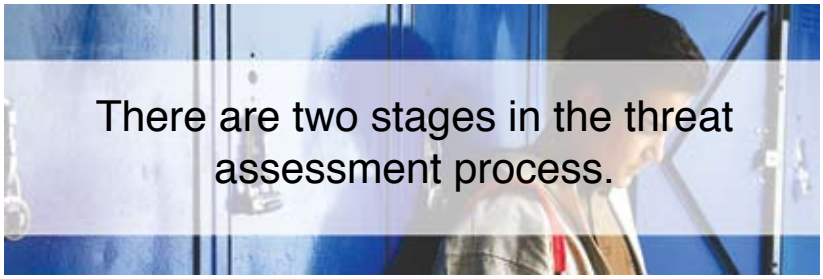
The TAT at this first stage is school-based and typically includes the following professionals and others as appropriate (on a case by case basis):

- School Administrator and/or designate
- Clinicians (e.g. Psychologist, Social Worker)
- Student Services Personnel (e.g. Resource, Counsellor)
- Police
- Other

The second stage is a comprehensive evaluation and longer term intervention and treatment planning.

School-based teams may expand to include collateral representation from the appropriate outside agencies in the completion of a comprehensive assessment including:

Community Service Providers (e.g. MATC, Youth Emergency Crisis Stabilization System)
- Child and Family Services
- Probation Workers
- Psychiatrists
- Police
- Children's Hospital
- Other



Determining When to Activate a Threat/Risk Assessment

There is a wide range of student behaviour that is of concern to schools and families. It is sometimes difficult to determine whether or not to activate a formal Threat Assessment process as there are no hard and fast rules. However; it is important to carefully consider each and every individual incident to ensure the most appropriate response.

Behaviours that Warrant Threat/Risk Assessment

All high-risk violence/threat making student behaviours shall be reported to the principal who will then activate the "Stage I" protocol for consultation with the Superintendent's Department and the TAT to assess the level of violent or threatening behaviour. In general, high-risk behaviours are those of students who if age twelve or older could be charged under Section 264.1 (1) of the Criminal Code of Canada which states that a student "who in any manner, knowingly utters, conveys or causes any person to receive a threat… to cause death or bodily harm to any person."

When data is obtained that suggests a student who has made a threat actually poses a threat, other members of the larger team may become involved in the "Stage II Assessment."

Violence/Threat Making Behaviours:

Examples of high-risk behaviours may include:

- Serious violence or violence with intent to harm or kill
- Verbal/written threats to kill others (“clear, direct, and plausible”)
- Internet website / MSN threats to kill others
- Possession of weapons (including replicas)
- Bomb threats (making and/or detonating explosive devices)
- Fire Setting
- Sexual intimidation or assault
- Gang related intimidation and violence

1. Threats

Threat assessment rests on two critical principles: first, that all threats and threat makers are not equal; second, that most threat makers are unlikely to carry out their threat. However, all threats must be taken seriously and evaluated. A threat is an expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something.

Threats may be written, verbal, drawn, posted on the Internet or made by gesture only and may be:
- Direct
- Indirect
- Conditional
- Veiled

Some threats (veiled and indirect) may not meet the standard of law for criminal charges but do warrant assessment. An example might be when TAT members become aware of a target who is the subject of a gang-related hand sign that denotes “let’s get him” or “take him out”. In other cases, TAT members may know that a particular student of concern has used a non-verbal throat cutting gesture prior to severely beating his targets. In such cases activation of the TAT would be appropriate.

2. Violence

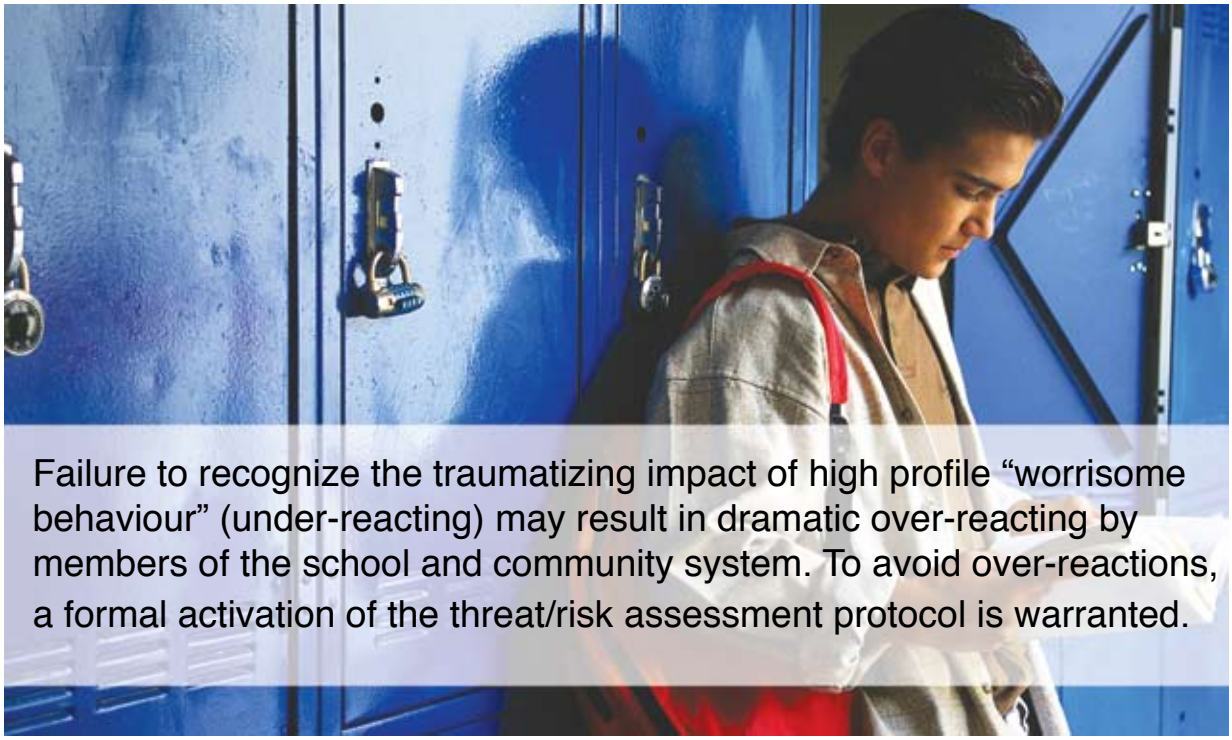
When violence occurs, the following guidelines can help administrators determine if the case should be addressed as a threat/risk assessment case:

Consult with TAT members if:
- lower baseline violence appears unprovoked
- clear victim and perpetrator dyad with power imbalance (age, size, social power, etc.) is evident
- no intent to harm is present
- if the frequency, intensity, recency (FIR) of the violence denotes an increase in the behavioural baseline of the perpetrator(s)

Activate the Threat Assessment Team and protocol if:
- serious violence occurs
- there is intent to seriously injure the target(s)
- when illegal weapons (knives, guns, replicas, machetes, etc.) are brandished or used in the commission of the offence
- direct, clear, and plausible threats to kill or seriously injure are communicated

3. Exceptional Cases: High Profile Worrisome Behaviour

Canadian schools are within the impact zones of several high profile school shootings. Elevated sensitivity by some students, staff, and parents to threat making behaviours and worrisome behaviours in the aftermath of



school shootings, such as Taber, Dawson College, Virginia Tech., and other high profile violent incidents, is typical. There are situations where students engage in threat-related behaviour that would usually be assessed as “worrisome behaviour” but, due to the context of the threat, formal threat/risk assessment may be required.

In these exceptional cases, the “worrisome behaviour” occurs in a setting where, by circumstance or design, there is an audience that may be traumatized and their reactions to the incident may trigger a broader trauma response in the school and community system. In these cases, failure to recognize the traumatizing impact of high profile “worrisome behaviour” (under-reacting) may result in dramatic over-reacting by members of the school and community system. To avoid over-reactions, a formal activation of the threat/risk assessment protocol is warranted.

4. Other Considerations

a. There is no profile or checklist for the high-risk student. Some students who actually pose a threat display very few traits of the traditional high-risk students. The key point is that multidisciplinary teams should not be deceived by stereotypes of the traditional high-risk student while failing to take seriously the threats of those who appear non-traditional.

b. Fluidity between homicidal and suicidal domains is common in many youth who commit serious acts of violence. Many threat makers do not pose a risk to others but may be thinking of suicide. However, it is not the role of the threat assessment team to assess suicidal students unless the student has engaged in other high-risk behaviour that has resulted in the team being called in the first place. General suicide risk assessment, independent of threats towards others, is outside of the specialized role of the TAT. Counsellors or others trained in suicide prevention would continue to handle these cases independent of the team. The TAT may become involved when factors contributing to the suicidal behaviour of the student are identified and related to school dynamics (e.g., the student is the recipient of violence or threats of violence at school.)

c. High-risk behaviours are assessed using dispositional and contextual data. Teams are not just interested in the disposition or personality of the threat maker; they are also interested in the context within which threats occur. Contextual variables (e.g., a student loses a friend from the basketball team who was

just killed in a car accident, his parents just separated, his girlfriend ended their relationship, and the student has just threatened to kill a classmate who has been bullying him for years) are factors that may contribute to threat-making behaviour at a certain point in time. The implication is that someone could be high-risk under certain circumstances that when addressed may result in eliminating the risk.

d. The multidisciplinary Threat Assessment protocol will not be activated when students with special needs engage in threat-making or aggressive behaviours that are typical to their "baseline". In other words, the TAT will not be called upon to conduct an assessment if the conduct of students with special needs is consistent with their diagnoses and how it has been known to manifest in them. If a student with special needs moves beyond his/her typical baseline, the TAT would be activated to assist in identifying factors related to the increase in baseline behaviour and to determine if he/she poses a risk to self or others.
There are times when a student with special needs has had a "slow but steady" increase in the "frequency" and "intensity" of violent or acting out behaviours. In this case there may not be a single incident prompting a Stage I Threat Assessment but information may emerge that requires the benefit of all or some of the Stage II members.

A note of caution: The same dynamics that can increase the risk of violence in the general student population can also be factors in contributing to the violence potential of the student with special needs independent of their diagnoses.

Behaviours that Typically Do Not Warrant Formal Threat/Risk Assessment as a Primary Intervention

In practice, the TAT members regularly consult with each other on situations of concern but "formal" action (activating the Division Protocol) is only taken when particular criteria are met. There are several situations where the protocol will either not be activated or will be a later consideration rather than a primary intervention.

1. Immediate Risk Situations

These situations include armed intruders inside the building or on the periphery who pose a risk to some target or targets, or active shooter (attacker) scenarios. When immediate risk is identified, the principal or designate will contact the police, (i.e., 911), and take steps to ensure the safety of all school members, as outlined in established protocols (e.g., perimeter lockdown, full-scale lockdown, etc.) In these cases a threat is posed and the matter is one of immediate police intervention; not threat assessment. A TAT does not have an immediate role here but may be utilized following the immediate crisis to assist with a follow-up inquiry and recommendations. Parents shall be contacted as determined by Police in consultation with the principal.

In these situations, the TAT will not be activated until the situation has been stabilized and the services of the formal TAT requested for possible re-entry into school. Prior to making decisions about re-entry into the regular school a formal Threat/Risk Assessment may be required.

2. Students Under Twelve Years of Age

When students under the age of twelve engage in violent or threat-related behaviours, developmental and exceptionality issues need to be taken into consideration. These students may benefit from police involvement as a way to provide a "teaching moment" for the child. Generally speaking, most threat-related behaviour exhibited by elementary aged students would fall into the category of "worrisome behaviours". However, elementary aged students can pose a risk. If there is a significant increase in baseline behaviour, weapons possession or clear, direct, and plausible threats, the formal Threat Assessment protocol will be activated.

3. Worrisome Behaviours

Worrisome behaviours are those that cause concern for members of the school system that may indicate that a student is moving toward a greater risk of violent behaviour. This would include instances where a student may be engaging in behaviours such as drawing pictures, writing stories in class, or making vague statements that do not, of themselves, constitute “uttering threats” as defined by law but are causing concern for some members of the school community because of their violent content.

The majority of high-risk behaviour falls into the worrisome behaviour category. All worrisome behaviours should be communicated to the team members and police for consultation. In these cases, the team is not formally activated. However; if further data is obtained that suggests the student has been violent, uttered threats to kill, or is in possession of a weapon, then the team is formally activated to deal with the new data.

In many cases following up on worrisome behaviours results in good early intervention measures. There are also cases where “a little data leads to a lot” and what seems like a minor case can quickly evolve to the formal activation of the TAT.

4. Non-School Hour Cases

If information is received by a TAT member regarding a threat that is “clear, direct, and plausible” before or after school hours, police will be called and parent(s) or caregiver(s) will be notified immediately so that they can take steps to notify and protect the target. The TAT team may be activated if the situation is deemed to have potential to pose ongoing risk to some member(s) of the school community.

Risk Assessment Report - JICM-E-2

Definition of Threat Assessment

(Threat Incident Report – JICM-E-2)

Threat assessment is the process of determining if a threat maker actually poses a risk to the target(s) being threatened. Multidisciplinary Stage I TAT’s engage in a data collection process to determine “initial levels of risk” that may be posed and plan necessary risk-reducing interventions.

Definition of Risk Assessment

(Risk Assessment Report – JICM-E-3)

Risk assessment is the process of determining if a student of concern may pose a further risk to some known or unknown target(s) at some unknown period in time. Risk assessment is meant to be a more comprehensive evaluation of all risk reducing and risk enhancing factors affecting the student’s functioning and determination of longer term intervention and treatment goals.

A risk assessment is a more lengthy process that may involve a number of standardized tests and measures that go beyond the scope of the school-based multidisciplinary threat assessment process. Although a student of concern may be initially assessed as low risk, additional data may indicate the need for a more comprehensive risk assessment.

Fair Notice

(Brochure: Student Threat Assessment – JICM-E-1)

Prior to any threat/risk assessment protocol being implemented, all students, staff, and parents should be provided with information about the protocol and procedures so that fair notice is given that violence and threats of violence will not be tolerated.

The Division expects that administrators will respond to threat-related behaviour. All incidents of threats will be taken seriously and students will be assessed accordingly. All staff has knowledge of what constitutes student threat-making behaviours and staff members shall promptly report any such behaviour to the Administration of the school.

The school shall also make clear to parents that if their child makes a threat of any kind, they will be contacted and will be expected to provide information to help evaluate the threat.

Fair Notice brochure: Student Threat Assessment – JICM-E-1 will be provided to all students and parents at the beginning of each school year in the first school newsletter. As well, Fair Notice will be provided through parent meetings, staff meetings, staff orientation and agenda books.

Create an Expectation for Responsible Reporting

Students who know about a threat are expected to inform school authorities. Students who are threatened should report the threat directly to the school administration. It is also important for all to understand that no action will be taken against a person who makes a report unless the report is made maliciously and without reasonable grounds. In such exceptional cases, the person making the malicious report will be dealt with according to school division policy and the law, where applicable.

Responsible Sharing of Information

Most provinces have legislation that permits information sharing under circumstances where there is imminent danger. It is important to review the relevant legislation and guidelines in Manitoba (Manitoba Pupil file Guidelines, Child Protection Services), and Canada (Youth Justice) to ensure adherence while providing for school safety.

The Supreme Court of Canada (1998) has established legal precedent by ruling (in R. vs. M [M.R.]) that in certain situations, the need to protect the greater student population supersedes the individual rights of the student. The ruling explicitly acknowledges that school officials must be able to act quickly and effectively to ensure the safety of the students and to prevent serious violations of the school rules. Two principles relevant to Threat Assessment Protocols were established by the Supreme Court:

The individual charter rights of the student are lessened to protect the collective need for safety and security of the general student population;

Schools officials have greater flexibility to respond to ensure the safety of the general student population in an educational setting than law enforcement officials have in a public setting.

Therefore, if an individual is in the possession of information that may indicate that there is an imminent danger to the health and safety of any person or persons and the source of the information is reliable, the information can be shared without consent. If information has been shared without consent, the individual shall be advised with whom the information was shared as required by law.

The Youth Criminal Justice Act also provides direction regarding sharing and disposal of information:

All sharing of youth justice information (i.e. relating to young persons aged 12-17 inclusive who are being dealt with under the criminal law) is subject to the nondisclosure provisions under ss. 119 (2) of the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

Under ss. 125 (6), the Youth Criminal Justice Act enables information in a YCJA record to be shared with any professional or other person engaged in the supervision or care of a young person – including a representative of any school board or school or any other educational or training institution – for a range of reasons, including safety of staff, students or other persons. Such sharing of information does not require the young person's consent.

The recipient of youth justice information is responsible for ensuring compliance with legislated restrictions on its use and disposal under YCJA ss. 126 (7). This provision requires that the information must be kept separate from any other record of the young person, that no other person must have access to the information except as authorized under the YCJA or for the purposes of ss. 125 (6), and that it must be destroyed when it is no longer needed for the purpose for which it was disclosed.

The Manitoba Pupil File Guidelines outlines the process related to third party requests for information. A third party is a person, group of persons or an organization other than the person that the information is about and other than the school division or district maintaining the record. In particular:

- Personal Information (FIPPA) – staff may disclose personal information about a pupil if the information is necessary to protect the mental or physical health or the safety of any individual or groups of individuals (clause 44(1)(l)).
- Personal Health Information (PHIA) – staff may disclose personal health information about a pupil if the school division or district believes that the disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and immediate threat to the mental or physical health or safety of the pupil or another individual or to the public health or public safety. (clause 22(2)(b)).
- Youth Criminal Justice Information (YCJA) – Youth criminal justice information in a pupil file may be disclosed by school staff to ensure the safety of staff, students or other individuals. (subsection 125(6) of the YCJA)

Involving Parents in Threat/Risk Assessment

Parent (Caregiver) Notification – Threat Maker

Parent(s)/caregiver(s) of the threat maker should be notified at the "earliest opportunity". Specifically, notification should occur after the TAT has collected enough initial data to confirm that a threat or violent incident has occurred and has determined the current level of violence potential.

Notification of parent(s)/caregiver(s) is meant to activate a collaborative process between home and school to more fully assess the student and plan for appropriate intervention where necessary.
If the student discloses child abuse during the threat assessment process, Child and Family Services personnel will collaborate with the TAT on appropriate timing of parent notification of the threat assessment. The agency may opt to notify parent(s)/ caregiver(s) themselves as part of their child protection investigation.

Parent (Caregiver) Notification – Target

The parent(s)/caregiver(s) of the target(s) should be notified at the "earliest opportunity." Often the target and his/her parent(s)/caregiver(s) are fearful or traumatized by the situation therefore notification should be done with skill, tact and planning. A plan should be made for possible emotional supports the family may need. As such, if the threat is "clear, direct, and plausible" or the TAT feels violence may be imminent, notification will occur after the target is secured/protected from potential harm (if the case is unfolding during school hours and the target is present at school).

The Role of Police

In immediate risk situations such as armed intruders in or on the premises who pose a threat or risk to one or more targets, or an active shooter (attacker) situation, the principal or designate will notify the police (i.e.,

911), and take steps to ensure the safety of all school members. In school settings this would include initiating a lock-down inside the building. In cases such as these an immediate risk and/or threat is posed and police intervention is required immediately. In all other instances, the role of police will vary depending on the level of threat:

a. Low Level

A low-level threat poses limited threat to public safety and in most cases police investigation would not be warranted for a possible criminal offence. If any police intervention is necessary it may be limited to minimal involvement, such as an interview with the student, his/her parents and the TAT.

b. Moderate Level

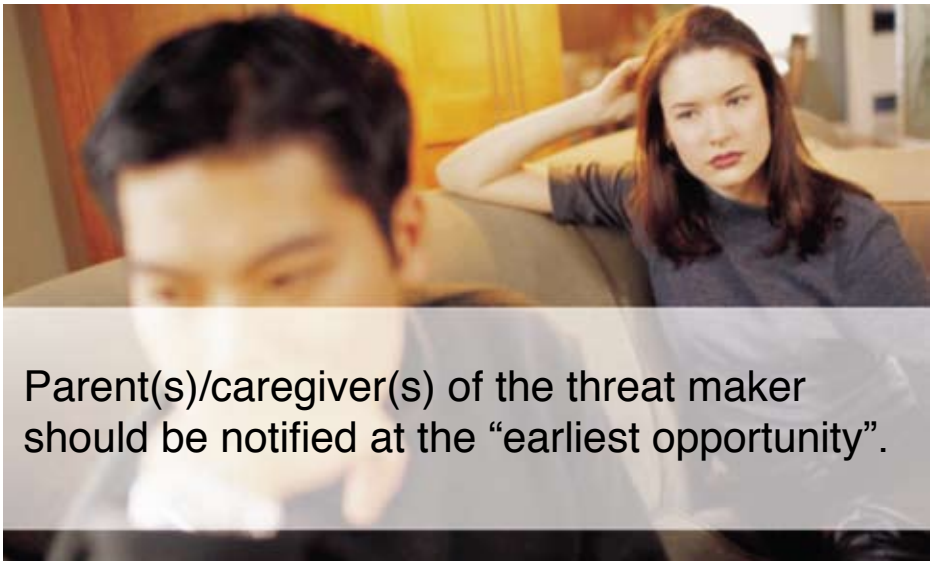
A moderate-level threat may pose a more significant threat that warrants investigation as a possible criminal offence. Most often, police, as well as other sources should be contacted, to collect additional information. Once information is collected and assessed it is possible the level of threat may be down graded to a low level category or upgraded to a high level category.

c. High Level

A high-level threat is highly likely to result in criminal prosecution. The school should immediately contact the police and implement any crisis response plans deemed necessary, such as a lock-down procedure be put into effect immediately. Police should be kept informed of actions taken in response to the threat.

In cases of violence or criminal threats, the police service will determine whether charges will be laid in cases when a student is 12 years of age or older.

A police investigation does not prevent the remaining TAT members from continuing with data collection relative to the threat assessment including obtaining history of prior target selection, site selection, and shifts in baseline behaviours.



Conducting a Threat/Risk Assessment

High-risk /threatening behaviour is reported to school administration

↕

School administration determines immediate facts

↕

School administration activates TAT

↕

Stage 1:
TAT completes data collection and implements immediate risk
(Threat Incident Report – JICM-E-2)

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If Necessary
Stage 2:
TAT completes risk evaluation (low, medium, high) and develops long term intervention/treatment and/or risk management plan
(Risk Assessment Report – JICM-E-3)

It is imperative that school administration develop a preliminary intervention plan to manage threat makers prior to an out of school suspension. An out of school suspension is high risk as this period is often viewed by high-risk students as the “last straw”. It is in this stage that many threat makers decide to finalize a plan to terrorize their school or attack a specific target: this can include homicidal or suicidal acts. The suspension does not “cause” the violence to occur but creates the necessary “context” for the high-risk student, who is already struggling with suicidal and/or homicidal ideation, to take the final step from planning to action. If suspension is necessary, a critical question beyond “when to suspend” is “where to suspend”. The isolation and disconnection felt by high-risk students during an out of school suspension may be exacerbated if steps are not taken to keep the student connected to healthy adult supports.

Stage I

Stage I Threat Assessment is the evaluation of immediate risk based on initial data collected by the TAT. Interviewing the target, bystanders, peers, teachers, caregivers, checking the locker and the bedroom are all part of the “data collection and immediate risk reducing intervention” associated with this stage. This stage is focused on the threat or violence at hand and whether or not the student poses an immediate risk. Some cases may be a moment in time along the complex, evolutionary pathway to serious violence. TATs may learn that an incident is one of many increases in baseline behaviour over the past weeks, months, or years and without intervention the student is likely to further escalate.

Stage II

When data obtained suggests that a student who has made a threat (or has already engaged in violence) actually poses a threat (or risk of further violence), other members of the larger team may become involved in the “Stage II” phase. At this stage the focus is on a more comprehensive evaluation and longer term treatment planning

Remember:

First Hypothesis in Threat Assessment: “It’s a cry for help!”

Second Hypothesis in Threat Assessment: “Fluidity”

Data Collection

“An investigative, sceptical, inquisitive mindset is critical to successful threat assessment.” (Fein, et. al. 2002)

An investigative mindset is central to successful application of the threat assessment process. Threat assessment requires thoughtful probing, viewing information with healthy scepticism and paying attention to

key points about pre-attack behaviours. Authorities who conduct the threat assessments must strive to be both accurate and fair.

Moreover, threat assessors should question the information in front of them continuously. Ideally, there should be credible verification of all essential facts. Information about a potential attacker's interests, statements, and actions should be corroborated, wherever possible.

The following are individuals who should be interviewed when a formal threat assessment is activated: teachers and other school staff, students, target(s), threat maker(s), parents/caregivers and others.

Prior to conducting a **series of interviews** (i.e. those beyond that of the reporter) the team should ask the following questions:

1. How much time do we have?
2. Who will be interviewed?
3. In what order will we interview them?
4. Who will interview whom?

Depending on the severity of the case one TAT member may serve as the primary interviewer to ensure continuity of data collection and interviewing technique. The higher the level of potential risk the more appropriate it is to use a primary interviewer to lead the process. When criminal charges are likely, the police member of the TAT may take the lead; when mental health issues appear to be the dominant concern the clinical member of the TAT may take the lead.

The Strategic Interview

Multiple aspects of the threat maker's life need to be explored through the data gathering process. Contextual data may be obtained from multiple sources including teachers and other school staff, students, target(s), threat maker(s), parents/caregivers and others

Refer to Appendix B for an explicit and thorough guide to the types of data to be collected by the multidisciplinary threat/ risk assessment team.

Evaluation

Following a thorough assessment of all contextual information, risk factors, responsible information sharing and careful consideration of data and information provided by the family, the TAT makes an evaluation of the threat or risk posed by the student. Typically the team will determine if the risk of harm is low, medium or high.

After determining the level of risk, a long term intervention plan is developed that is consistent with and responsive to the level of risk posed by the student.

Threat Risk Assessment: Intervention and Management

Guidelines for Re-entry into School

When data suggests that a student poses a threat to others, he/she may be suspended from school until a more comprehensive assessment can be conducted. Threat assessment teams will guide the process from initial assessment, to planning interventions to decrease risk, to planning for re-entry into a school where a suspension has occurred. This is best accomplished when the TATs outline, in writing, steps the student, family, school, and others need to follow to ensure an appropriate assessment(s) is conducted prior to re-entry into the school. Following the completion of necessary assessments, the initial TAT members may work with the student and the parent(s)/caregiver(s) to develop a plan for re-entry that becomes a signed contract by all participants including the student and parent(s).

TAT members may need to consult with other agencies to plan supportive services. For example, it may be necessary to consider the need for increased supervision in the school setting, referral to community based mental health services, psychiatric consultation/hospitalization, or in rare cases, secure residential treatment.

Supporting Targeted or Victimized Students or Staff

The TAT members should be responsible to ensure that the victim(s) are assessed and that services are provided as necessary. The TAT should determine if crisis counselling or a crisis response team is needed.

Key Point: There may be cases where the recipient of a threat has been engaged in high-risk behaviours that precipitated the threat(s) in the first place. In those situations, the recipient of the threat(s) may need to be assessed for high-risk behaviour as well.

Unauthored Threats: Assessment and Intervention

Unauthored threats are typically threats to commit a violent act against an individual(s), specific group, or site (e.g., the school). They may be found written on bathroom walls or stalls, spray painted on the side of schools, posted on the internet or letters left in conspicuous places (e.g., teacher's desk).

Upon discovery of a written threat, the Administrator/Designate shall take action according to the steps outlined in Appendix C.

> As of this writing, there are no known North American cases where an unauthored threat to kill was issued and a homicide occurred on the day the threat stated.

Although unauthored threats may be credible in the world of global terrorism, in the field of school-based child and adolescent threat assessment, the lack of ownership (authorship) of the threat generally denotes a lack of commitment. Nevertheless, there are steps that should be followed to assess the unauthored threat, attempt to identify the threat maker and avoid or minimize the crisis/trauma response postvention.

1. Assessing the Unauthored Threat

Threat assessment teams should assess the language of commitment in determining the initial level of risk associated with a particular unauthored threat.
Based on the current data (i.e., language of the threat) consider the following factors:

A. Amount of detail (location where the violence is to occur, target(s), date and time the violence is to occur, justifications, etc.).
B. Threatened to do what with what (“kill”, “murder”, “ruin your lives”, “shank”, “shoot”, etc.)
C. Method of delivery of the threat (who found/received the threat, when was it received, where was it received, who else did they tell and who else knows about it?).
D. Is the threat clear, direct, plausible, and consistent?

2. Identifying the Threat Maker

Although in many cases the author is never found, steps that can be taken to identify the author(s) are:

A. Handwriting analysis.
B. Word usage (phrases and expressions that may be unique to a particular person or group of people [street gang, club, sports team, etc.]).
C. Spelling (errors or modifications unique to an individual or group).

Key Point:

There may be cases where the recipient of a threat has been engaged in high-risk behaviours that precipitated the threat(s) in the first place. In those situations, the recipient of the threat(s) may need to be assessed for high-risk behaviour as well.

Depending on the severity of the threat, some or all staff members may be asked to assist in analysing the unauthored threat.

Contra-indicators:

- Some authors will switch gender and try to lead the reader to believe they are a boy (or girl) when they are not or pretend to be someone else as a setup.
- Some individuals who write unauthored “hit lists” embed their own names in the list of identified targets.

3. Postvention: Crisis/Trauma Management

If the language of threat is low risk and only a few people are aware of the incident, there is usually no need to notify students, staff, and/or parents. In some schools and communities, the unnecessary notification of a “threat-related” incident will cause more damage than good.

Sample

Dear Parents

You may be aware that information was received by school administration that resulted in the threat assessment protocol being activated. This was a precautionary measure only as the incident was not one that posed any risk to students or staff. However, as part of our ongoing commitment to ensuring a safe learning environment we take all issues that may affect school safety seriously.

If the threat is more specific and deemed a moderate to high risk and includes names of particular targets, then those targeted must be notified. In the case of student targets, parents or caregivers must be notified pending any unique circumstances. If the case is only known to a few and the target selection is very clear and specific, then the rest of the students and staff would only be notified if they are directly related to the case.

If the threat is deemed moderate to high risk but several students and staff, outside of the target group are aware, then all students, staff and parents should be notified in general terms that an incident is under investigation and the school is following the lead of the police. Ensure everyone that all students and staff are safe and that the situation is being managed collaboratively as part of the multidisciplinary TAT protocol.

Whether the threat is high risk or not, if the school and community are responding traumatically then it is appropriate to consider closing the school for the day upon which the threat was intended to be carried out or, more commonly, increase police presence on the day or time surrounding the intended time the threat was to be carried out.

Information should always be communicated for the purpose of modelling appropriate openness and reducing/mitigating an increase in system anxiety. How information is shared will depend on circumstance but, in high anxiety situations, it is better to provide information in person where possible. This may include an evening information meeting for parents facilitated by TAT members.

If the language of the threat is low risk but several students, staff, and others are aware of the incident and it appears to be elevating the anxiety of some in the school, then all students, staff, and parents should be notified.

Conclusion

The materials and information in this protocol are intended as an informed guide to assessing, intervening with and managing high-risk, violent and threat making behaviour. Importantly, no two cases are the same and each individual incident must be treated as unique. The strengths of this model lie in the use of a multi-disciplinary team that investigates and evaluates all the factors and contexts of the student's life and the specific incident of concern. The model provides an avenue to ensure that appropriate interventions are provided to students, staff, parents and the community at large.

Appendix A: Consent Guidelines – Department of Education

Special Note: This section adapted, with consent, from the Yukon Department of Education's Yukon Threat Assessment Program (Y-TAP) policy and procedure manual.

The general intent of Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Acts is to limit the sharing of personal information without the consent of the person. Wherever possible and reasonable, consent should be obtained. The individual should know what he/she is consenting to, and understand the consequences of the intended disclosure. The individual must be made aware that he/she can withdraw consent at any time by giving written or verbal notice of this.

The requirements for proper consent include:

- A clear authorization of what information will be disclosed;
- With whom the information will be shared;
- The purpose of the information to be shared;
- The length of time the information will be shared;
- An indication that the individual understands the risks and benefits of providing or not providing consent.

Sharing Youth Justice Information: Youth Criminal Justice Act

All sharing of youth justice information (i.e. relating to young persons aged 12-17 inclusive who are being dealt with under the criminal law) is subject to the non-disclosure provisions under ss. 119(2) of the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

Under ss.125 (6), the Youth Criminal Justice Act enables information in a YCJA record to be shared with any professional or other person engaged in the supervision or care of a young person – including a representative of any school board or school or any other educational or training institution – for a range of reasons, including safety of staff, students or other persons. Such sharing of information does not require the young person's consent.

The recipient of youth justice information is responsible for ensuring compliance with legislated restrictions on its use and disposal under YCJA ss.126 (7). This provision requires that the information must be kept separate from any other record of the young person, that no other person must have access to the information except as authorized under the YCJA or for the purposes of ss.125 (6), and that it must be destroyed when it is no longer needed for the purpose for which it was disclosed.

Children's Act Records
Most provincial Acts enable the Director to consent to the disclosure of records maintained under the Children's Act. There is no time period limiting this.

Student Records: Providing Consent on Behalf of Another
Individuals may be represented by another person. For example, a child's guardian, lawyers and/or legal representatives, may consent to disclosure of the child's personal information providing that such disclosure is not an unreasonable invasion of the child's privacy.

Student Records: Children's Consent
Children have rights to the protection of their personal information similar to adults. However, their rights may sometimes be exercised by another, in particular a parent or guardian. This is sometimes due to the child being, by reason of age or immaturity, unable to fully understand his/her rights. On the other hand, the child may sometimes be considered sufficiently mature to exercise his/her rights independently.

Where children can consent, in deciding whether a child can give independent consent to release his/her personal information, the following can be taken into account:

- The governing legislation
- The age of the child
- The child's level of maturity. Is the child able to understand the requirements of consent (what, who, why, and how long?)
- The sensitivity of the information and the consequences of releasing it. For example, there may be information about a child that should not be shared with a parent; there may be information that must be shared or withheld for the safety or best interests of the child.

Factors to Consider in Determining Whether the Disclosure is an Unreasonable Invasion of a Child's Personal Privacy

- Other relevant information about the disclosure
- Age of the child
- The family situation
- The sensitivity of the information
- Whether the child supplied the information in confidence
- Whether the information is likely to be inaccurate or unreliable
- Whether the information is relevant to a fair determination of the child's rights not the guardian's rights
- Whether there are any compelling reasons affecting anyone's health or safety.

Appendix B: Strategic Interviewing: Guide to Data Collection

Note: The following series of questions are comprehensive and useful for Stage I and Stage II Data Collection.

Series I – Details of the Incident
Explores the who/what/why/when/where details of the threat or violence including weapons possession and the type of threats made (direct, indirect, conditional, or veiled)

Threats (Weapon Possession)
- Where did the incident happen and when?
- How did it come to the team's attention?
- What was the specific language of threat?
- Was the threat direct, indirect, conditional, or veiled?
- Who was present and under what circumstance was the threat made?
- What was the response of the target (if present) and/or others who were present at the time of the threat?

Violence
- Where did the incident happen and when?
- How did it come to the team's attention?
- What was the specific language used during the violent incident?
- Who was present and under what circumstance did the violence occur?
- What was the response of the target and/or others who were present at the time of the incident?
- Was the violence provoked or unprovoked?
- Was intent to harm present?
- Were illegal weapons (knives, guns, replicas, machetes, etc.) brandished or used in the commission of the offence?
- Was there intent to seriously injure the target(s)

Series II - Attack – Related Behaviours
Explores the history of and details of any and all attack/assault related behaviour in the past

- Has the threat maker sought out information consistent with their threat making behaviour (i.e.: has the student who threatened to "bomb the school" been downloading bomb making instructions off the Internet)?
- Has the threat maker attempted to gain access to weapons or do they have access to the weapons they have threatened to use?
- Have they developed a plan and how general or specific is it (time, date, identified target selection, site selection, journal of justifications, maps and floor plans)?
- Has the threat maker been engaging in suspicious behaviour such as appearing to show an inordinate interest in alarm systems, sprinkle systems, video surveillance in schools or elsewhere, schedules and locations of police or security patrol?
- Have they engaged in rehearsal behaviours, including packing or brandishing fake but realistic looking weapons, air rifles, pistols, or engaged in fire setting (i.e.: lighting fire to card board tubes cut and taped to look like a pipe bomb, etc.)?
- Is there any evidence of attack related behaviours in their locker (back pack, car trunk, etc.) at school or bedroom (shed, garage, etc.) at home?

Series III - Threat Maker Typology
Explores the personality and behavioural patterns of the threat maker in detail

- Does the threat maker have a history of violence or threats of violence?
- If yes, what is the frequency, intensity and recency (FIR) of the violence?

- Does the frequency, intensity, recency (FIR) of the violence denote a significant increase in behavioural baseline of the perpetrator(s)
- What has been their past human target selection?
- What has been their past site selection?
- Have they primarily engaged in instrumental violence or affective violence?
- Do they have a history of depression or suicidal thinking/behaviour?
- Is there evidence of fluidity?
- Are they open and honest about the incident or dishonest?
- Is the current incident an increase in behavioural baseline?
- Do they feel justified in attacking the target and have they also dehumanized the target?

Series IV - Empty Vessel
Explores the threat maker's connection to healthy adult supports and other social-cultural aspects of his/her personality

- Does the threat maker or student of concern have a healthy relationship with a mature adult?
- If they do not have a healthy connection what (or who) are they filling themselves with?
- Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intentions to attack a target?
- Have others been forewarned of a pending attack or told not to come to school because "something big is going to happen?"
- Does the student have inordinate knowledge or interest in violent events, themes, or incidents, especially prior school–based attacks?
- How have they responded to prior violent incidents (local, national, etc.)?
- Do they identify with the aggressors and justify their actions?
- Do they critique the aggressor's behaviours and talk about how they would or could do it better?
- What type of violent games, movies, books, music, Internet searches, does the threat maker fill themselves with?
- Is there evidence that what they are filling themselves with is influencing their behaviour?
- Imitators vs. Innovators?
- What related themes are present in their writings, drawings, etc?
- Is there evidence of fluidity and/or religiosity?

Series V - Target Typology
Explores the relationship between the threat maker and the target with interest in the target's potential for violence as well

- Does the target have a history of violence or threats of violence?
- If yes, what is the frequency, intensity and recency (FIR) of the violence?
- What has been their past human target selection?
- What has been their past site selection?
- Have they primarily engaged in instrumental violence or affective violence?
- Do they have a history of depression or suicidal thinking/behaviour?
- Is there evidence of fluidity?
- Are they open and honest about the incident or dishonest?
- Is there evidence of an increase in their baseline behaviour?
- Do they feel justified in attacking the threat maker and have they also dehumanized the threat maker?

Series VI - Peer Dynamics and Structure
Explores the threat maker's influence in the peer group and the peer group's influence upon the threat maker as well as power differentials among peer members

- Was there a clear victim and perpetrator dyad with power imbalance (age, size, social power, etc?)
- Are others involved in the incident that may intentionally or unintentionally be contributing to the justification process?

- Is the target more at risk for perpetrating violence than the threat maker?
- Who is in the threat makers peer structure and where does the threat maker fit (i.e.: leader, co-leader, and follower)?
- Are there others in the threat makers peer structure that may be directly or indirectly influencing the threat maker and is their baseline behaviour higher or lower than the threat makers?
- Is there a difference between the threat maker's individual baseline and their peer group baseline behaviour?
- Who is in the targets peer structure and where does the target fit (i.e.: leader, co – leader, follower)?
- Are there others in the targets peer structure who may be directing or influencing the target and is their baseline behaviour higher or lower than the targets?
- Is there a difference between the targets individual baseline and their peer group baseline behaviour?

Series VII - Contextual Factors (Triggers)
Explores events in the threat maker's life that might be triggers for violence. For example, recent losses, humiliation, stressors, family disruptions etc.

- Has the threat maker experienced a recent loss, such as a death of a family member or friend; a recent break-up; rejection by a peer or peer group; been cut from a sports team; received a rejection notice from a college, university, military etc?
- Have their parents just divorced or separated?
- Are they victims of child abuse and has the abuse been dormant but resurfaced at this time?
- Are they being initiated into a gang and is it voluntary or forced recruitment?
- Have they recently had an argument or "fight" with a parent/caregiver or someone close to them?
- Have they recently been charged with an offence or suspended or expelled from school?
- Is the place where they have been suspended to likely to increase or decrease their level of risk?

Series VIII - School Dynamics and Structure
Explores the dynamics of the adult structures in the school (i.e. Naturally Open – Naturally Closed – Traumatically Open – Traumatically Closed) as well as flow of information, leadership styles and processes for managing either negative or positive behavioural patterns

- What is the history of trauma in the school/community?
- Is the current incident occurring in a defined international, national, or local critical period?
- Is the flow of information typically open between all levels of the system (i.e. Naturally Open – Naturally Closed – Traumatically Open – Traumatically Closed)?
- Is the flow of information in this case open or is some other dynamic influencing this particular case (i.e. the threat/violence occurred in the back of the school while the witnesses and threat maker were smoking "pot" and no one wants to implicate themselves)?
- Could a parent(s) or caregiver(s) be adding to or maintaining the justification process?
- Could a staff member(s) be adding to or maintaining the justification process?
- If several parents or staff members seem to be overreacting or underreacting is there an underlying "human systems dynamic" driving the behaviour?

Series IX - Family Dynamics and Structure
Explores who all lives in the family, family structure, historical baseline of behaviour at home, disciplinary style and behaviour expectations in the home etc

- How many homes does the student reside in (shared custody, goes back and forth from parent to grandparents home)?
- Is the student connected to a healthy/ mature adult in the home?
- Do the parents or caregivers know what the contents of the bedroom are or is the bedroom off-limits?
- If they do not know the contents of the bedroom is it due to a "rule-the-roost" dynamic or a parental attitude about privacy?
- Who all lives in the family home (full-time and part-time)?

- What is the family structure (patriarchal, matriarchal, chaotic, stage two parentification, etc.)?
- Has the student engaged in violence or threats of violence towards their siblings or parent(s) caregiver(s)? If so, what form of violence and to whom including Frequency, Intensity, and Recency (FIR)?
- What is the historical baseline at home? What is the current baseline at home? Is there evidence of evolution at home?
- Are parent(s) or caregiver(s) concerned for their own safety or the safety of their children or others?
- Does the students level or risk (at home, school, or the community) cycle according to who is in the home (i.e. the student is low risk for violence when his/her father is home but high risk during the times their father travels away from home for work)?
- Does the student have a history of trauma? Including car accidents, falls, exposed to violence, abuse, etc.
- Has the student been diagnosed with a DSM IV diagnoses?
- Is there a history of mental health disorders in the family?
- Is there a history of drug or alcohol abuse in the family?

Series X – Baseline Overview
Explores the history of human and site target selection; Frequency, Intensity, Recency (FIR) of violence, threats or weapon possession; difference from individual baseline versus peer group baseline; drug and alcohol baseline and evidence of evolution of a violent pathway etc.

- What is the history of human target selection?
- What is the history of site selection?
- What is the Frequency, Intensity, Recency (FIR) of violence, threats, or weapon possession?
- Is there a difference from individual baseline versus peer group baseline?
- Is there a drug and alcohol baseline related to violence and is it different from when the student is clean?
- What is the student's cognitive baseline and is there evidence of evolution?
- What is the student's affective baseline and is there evidence of evolution?

Appendix C: Summary of Actions to be Taken When Responding to Unauthored Threats

1. Document the threat by recording words and taking a clear, legible photo of the threat.

2. Lock or close off room where threat was discovered until initial assessment has occurred. If initial assessment indicates a need for police involvement, call police, maintain the security of the location and await police directive. Removal of evidence is dependent on police directive and/or response time.

3. Get name of person(s) who discovered and reported the threat.

4. Principal/Designate consults with Superintendent's Department and/or Divisional Contact.

5. If a student or students have reported the threat, contact their parent(s) or guardians(s) to indicate follow-up is occurring. The timing of the contact can vary according to circumstance, but should be done before the student(s) goes home.

6. In a moderate to high risk situation where many staff and students are aware of the written threat, inform staff of what has occurred, and advise what to tell students. In these situations, students, staff and parents should be notified by letter providing general information, and reassuring them that police have been notified. In written communication, do not repeat what was said in the threat. Notify all other groups in the school, such as day cares or nursery schools.

7. Complete Threat Incident Report Form JICM-E-2.