

# AN INTRODUCTION TO A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR THREAT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT

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## Website

<http://www.studentthreatassessment.org>

**This presentation will review the collaborative, multi-agency structure of the Mid-Valley Student Threat Assessment Team and the Mid-valley Adult Threat Advisory Team, both located in Salem, Oregon.**

**The presentation will provide:**

- **A brief review of basic threat assessment principles**
- **A discussion of the advantages of a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency threat assessment and management system**
- **An overview of a successful multi-disciplinary, multi-agency threat assessment and management system...**
- **A review of the developmental steps necessary to implement that system.**
- **And a case review and management exercise.**

## **DEFINITION OF A THREAT**

**The intention  
to commit harm to a target  
or be a menace or source of danger to a target.**

## The Threat Assessment System objectives are:

1. **Assess** threats of potentially harmful or lethal behavior and determine the level of concern and action required.
2. **Organize** resources and strategies to manage situations involving people that pose threats to other people (students, staff, the community).
3. **Maintain** a sense of psychological safety within the community

# WHAT IS THREAT ASSESSMENT?

**“The primary purpose of a threat assessment is to prevent targeted violence. The threat assessment process is centered upon analysis of the facts and evidence of behavior in a given situation. The appraisal of risk in a threat assessment focuses on actions, communications, and specific circumstances that might suggest that an individual intends to mount an attack and is engaged in planning or preparing for that event.”**

## **We do not do:**

- **Predictive Profiling.**
- **Enhanced Professional Judgment**
- **Artificial Intuition**
- **Future Predictions**
- **Labels**



# Basic Concepts from Research

- People don't just snap!
- There are always pre-incident indicators to acts of targeted violence:
  - Inappropriate communications
  - Recent Loss/Humiliation
  - Abnormal/Obsessive behavior/Depression
  - Prior acts of violence
  - Keeping a diary
  - Purchasing a weapon

## Pre-incident Indicators to Targeted Violence continued.

- Past violence
- Blaming others and the inability to accept personal responsibility
- Inappropriate reactions
- Sudden irrational beliefs and ideas
- Substantial disconnect from others
- Deterioration of personal hygiene
- Romantic obsessions with an uninterested co-worker
- Substance abuse



## Pre-incident Indicators to Targeted Violence continued.

- Little or no social support system
- Convey violence in journal writing, drawing or conversation
- Disruptive, aggressive or violent towards people, animals or property
- Obsession with firearms
- Poor self-esteem
- Anger outbursts
- Mental Health issues
- Obsessive behavior
- Stalking
- Rehearsal

# INHIBITORS

- Inhibitors are positive factors that are present in the suspect's life which would inhibit them from acting in a violent manner.
  - **Employment**
  - **Finances**
  - **Health**
  - **Residence**
  - **Children**
  - **Family**
  - **Looking to the future**
  - **Resolving the “grievance”**

# Types of Threats

- Direct Threat
- Conditional Threat
- Inappropriate Communication

# The Basics....

1. Agency-wide funnel of information
2. Authority
3. Capacity
4. Systems Relationships

# WHEN

- The threat assessment and management evaluation should begin when one of the following triggering events are present:
  - A threat.
  - An inappropriate communication.
  - The execution and issuance of a restraining or stalking order.
  - A report of suspicious activity.
  - The recognition of pre-incident indicators of violence.

# Threat Management Process

- Determine the Facts
- Initial Assessment
- Immediate Actions
- Investigation
- Continuous Assessment
- Develop Management Plan
- Follow Up

# Targeted Violence Type (process)



# **ADVANTAGES OF A THREAT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

- **Shared ownership, shared responsibility. Decreased liability.**
- **Multi-discipline, multi-agency.**
- **Expeditious but methodical.**
- **Community collaboration and ownership.**
- **Identification of risk in clear terms.**
- **Interventions and supervision strategies that fit the situation and accurately address risk.**
- **Promotes observation and supervision. System safely keeps many students in school who would otherwise be removed through expulsion or by other means.**
- **Increases both the physical safety and the psychological sense of safety in the community.**



# Threat Assessment in the Mid-Willamette Valley

- In 1998, The Marion County Threat Assessment Team was formed through the collaboration of the Sheriff's Office, the Oregon State Courts and Salem Keizer School District. The team addressed threats against public figures, threats in the workplace and schools, domestic violence and stalking.
- In 2000, using this model as an example, the Salem-Keizer School District led a collaboration of law enforcement agencies and youth service public in the development of a youth threat assessment system.

# **Threat Assessment in the Mid-Willamette Valley**

- **The development process involved a thorough survey of available research, best practice recommendations and the consultation of local practitioners who regularly encounter potentially violent situations involving youth.**
- **Finally the system was refined and completed with the consultation of administrators, counselors, police officers, social workers, community mental health specialists, probation officers, school psychologists and risk management personnel.**

## **Threat Assessment in the Mid-Willamette Valley**

- **Within the following year, the Willamette Education Service District implemented the system throughout the rural school districts in two counties.**
- **The Student Threat system in place today includes a site based screening completed by a trained multi-disciplinary team (called a Level 1) and, if needed, a more comprehensive and in-depth assessment and consultation completed by a multi-agency team (called a Level 2).**
- **The system is operated from a collaboration of all of the public agencies that serve youth (including law enforcement). Members of this collaboration are trained to the highest standards available.**

## **Threat Assessment in the Mid-Willamette Valley cont....**

- **The Adult Threat Advisory Team allows for the equivalent of the Level 1 Screening to take place within the individual agencies before being brought to the table.**
- **The system is operated from a collaboration of all of the public agencies. Members of this collaboration are trained to the highest standards available.**

# Adult Threat Assessment

Information specific to the Marion  
County Threat Advisory Team or  
TAT.

# Adult Threat Advisory Team

- Marion County Sheriff's Office \*\*
- Salem Police Department \*\*
- Oregon State Police
- Keizer Police Department
- State Courts-Marion County
- Marion County District Attorney's Office \*\*
- Salem-Keizer School District \*\*
- Willamette Educational Service District
- Marion County Health Department

# Team Principles

- The team does not manage cases
- The team does not investigate cases
- Control of the case remains with the presenting agency
- Rank is not recognized
- The team is advisory only
- We do not assess people, we assess situations
- The team does not generate reports
- The team does not profile
- Confidentiality!!!!
- Unanticipated benefits-Intel, other cases, etc

# Our System is Threat Assessment and Management

- We don't predict, we prevent!!!!
- Evaluate pre-incident behavioral indicators for the purpose of preventing targeted violence.
- Determine the value of the threatening situation by assessing:
  - Intent
  - Motive
  - Ability to carry out the threat
- Hunter vs Howler
- Develop a strategy to defuse the potential risk



# Case Management Options

- Do Nothing
- Watch and Wait
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Intervention
- Intervention Interview
- Administrative Action
- Restraining Order
- Mental Commitment
- Arrest

# What Can We Do to Help?

- Public Safety Overrides
- Bail Increase
- Red flag for prosecution
- Red flag for Courts
- Enhanced Sentencing
- Safety Planning
- Conditions of Probation
- Safety Planning
- Psychological Evaluations
- Access to Social Services
- Mental Health referrals
- Hardening of targets
- Reach out and touch someone!
- Wait and monitor

# CONFIDENTIALITY AND THREAT ASSESSMENT

*(A School Threat Assessment Team should consult with their respective legal counsel on existing laws and regulations prior to the development of information-sharing policies.)*

**Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):** A Federal law that protects the privacy of education records or any records that contain information directly relating to a student and that are maintained by the educational institution or a person acting for the institution. FERPA permits disclosure of personally identifiable information without consent in certain circumstances, including:

1. To school officials with legitimate educational interests as established by FERPA...
2. To appropriate officials in health and safety emergencies...
3. To comply with a lawfully issued judicial order or subpoena.

Obtain a copy of FERPA regulations at  
[www.ed.gov/offices/fpco/ferparegs.html](http://www.ed.gov/offices/fpco/ferparegs.html).

## **A FEW MORE DETAILS REGARDING FERPA AND INFORMATION SHARING**

- **Information from education records may be shared with police, social services, or other community representatives who are serving on a school's established threat assessment committee, if they are school officials with legitimate educational interests in accordance with the school's established criteria. Such individuals may not use that information for any purpose other than consideration on that committee, nor may they take the information back to their agencies or share it with anyone else except under the provisions of FERPA.**
- **A school's law enforcement unit's records are excluded from the definition of "education records."**
- **FERPA does not have a personal liability recourse. Claims are made through US Dept. of Ed against schools. Personal claims are made through state law.**

## Updated FERPA Regulations-January2009

The new regulations impose a "rational basis" test on a school's decisions to disclose information in emergency situations. "The Department [of Education] will not substitute its judgment for that of the agency or institution if, based on the information available at the time ... there is a rational basis for the agency's or institution's determination that a health or safety emergency exists."

# Leroy Rooker says:

(Director of the US. Department of Education's  
Family Policy Compliance Office)

- "We wanted to strike that balance between **privacy** and **safety** and certainly emphasize that safety on a campus is paramount. As long as you can articulate what that emergency was, we're not going to be in the business of second-guessing you on that."
- Still, according to the new rules, administrators must document what emergency circumstances prompted their decision to disclose information.

## **94% of administrators stated that:**

- **STAT effectively identified potentially dangerous students and situations.**
- **STAT had positive effects on school safety.**
- **STAT provided important information necessary for support, discipline, and placement decisions.**
- **STAT fulfills a valuable role in schools.**

**In the same survey, 90% of administrators reported that STAT increased efficient coordination with law enforcement and mental health.**

## **ORGANIZING A SYSTEM**

- **Need, justification and authorization.**
- **Community ownership, commitment, and responsibility.**
- **Policy and procedures necessary for functioning. (Legal counsel)**
- **Organize resources, design system and refine.**
- **Training, implementation, more training.**
- **Maintenance of program, trouble-shooting and ongoing training.**



## **Choosing Team Members (Modified from US Dept of Ed. and USSS)**

- **An ability to relate well to others.**
- **An awareness and sensitivity to the difference between harming and helping in an intervention.**
- **A reputation for fairness and trustworthiness.**
- **A questioning, analytical and even skeptical mindset.**
- **Training in the collection and evaluation of information from multiple sources.**
- **Discretion and an appreciation for the importance of keeping information confidential.**
- **Familiarity with the contemporary issues of school and community safety.**
- **The ability to serve as a formal link or liaison between various systems (a “boundary spanner”, a “team player” who believes in the project and the process.)**
- **In-depth knowledge about their own organization, resource availability, and both political and ethical boundaries. (No car-salesmen needed.)**
- **Full credibility and respect within their own organization.**

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