Responding to School Violence

RESPONDING TO THREATS OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

"Students who commit serious acts of violence do not suddenly 'snap'; their behavior is preceded by thought and planning. This means that targeted school violence can be prevented if enough is known about the student's preparatory behavior."

Once a threat is made, having a fair, rational, and standardized method of responding to threats is critically important.

INTRODUCTION

There is NO scientifically proven method for profiling students who may pose a risk for targeted violence at schools. The following procedures provide useful tools for assessing level of risk and determining appropriate interventions *once a threat has been made known.* They cannot be utilized to screen or pre-identify students for potential for violence.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

- Social Withdrawal
- Excessive feelings of isolation
- Excessive feelings of rejection
- Being a victim of violence
- Feelings of being picked on or persecuted
- Poor academic performance and interest in school
- Expression of violence in writings and drawings

IMMINENT WARNING SIGNS

- Physical fighting
- Destruction of property
- Rage for seemingly minor reasons
- Detailed threats of violence
- Possession or use of weapons
- Self-injurious behaviors
- Suicidal ideations

Threats may be spoken, written, or expressed in some other ways such as gestures. Threats maybe be direct or indirect:

Threat Assessment includes strategies to determine the seriousness of a threat and the likelihood that it will be carried out. It takes into consideration:

1) Student's Preparatory Behavior

Low Level: The student poses a minimal risk to the victim. The threats are often vague and indirect.

Medium Level: Threats can be carried out, but do not appear realistic. The students are more concrete about a place and time, but lack a detailed plan.

High Level: The threats are direct, specific, and plausible. They often include a time, place, and method for violence. The student may have already taken concrete steps, and the student appears to be an imminent threat to the safety of others.

2) The Context of the Threats
Transient vs. Substantive Threats

3) The Facts and Behaviors

4) The Information from Multiple Sources

5) Whether the student poses a threat

RESPONDING TO THREATS

1. Make referral to administration. Conduct initial interview using checklist to assess level of threat
   - Low Level Threats:
     a. Disciplinary Action
     b. Interventions
     c. Notify Parents. Schedule a Conference.
   - Medium and High Level Threats:
     a. Discipline referral
     b. Notify Parents. Schedule a Conference.
     c. Make referral to Guidance Counselor.
2. Referral to Guidance Counselor
   - Review student's records
   - Complete **Student Interview Form**
   - Review Imminent Danger Warning Signs
3. Administrator and Guidance Counselor determine if further action is needed. Such as:
   - Follow up by SRO and Law Enforcement
   - Refer to school psychologist for evaluation
4. If further evaluation is needed, obtain parent signature on the **Consent for Student Services Assistance** form.
   - If parent refuses to sign, the principal may make a recommendation for expulsion.
5. School psychologist conducts an evaluation.
6. Follow-up
   - Share results with administration, the team, and parents and schedule an intervention meeting when appropriate
   - Provide the parents with a referral to a community service agency
   - Monitor student's response to intervention

FACTS ABOUT VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

- School violence is not an epidemic. In fact, it is rare.

- All school shooters are not alike.

- School shooters often have social problems, but are not always loners.

- Although revenge is a common factor, it is not the only motivation of school shooters.

- Unusual or aberrant behaviors or interests are not the hallmarks of a violent student.

- Incidents of targeted violence at school are rarely impulsive.

- Prior to most incidents, the attacker has told someone about his or her plans.

- Most shooting incidents are not resolved by law enforcement.

- In many cases, other students are involved in some capacity.

- In a number of cases, bullying plays a key role in and can be a predictor of an attack.

"Cultures and climates of safety, respect, and emotional support can help diminish the possibility of targeted violence."

RESOURCES

Responding to Threats of Violence in Schools: General Guidelines and Procedures.

Jimerson, Brock, Stephen, Greif, (2004) Threat Assessment at School: A Primer for Educators. *National Association Of School Psychologists. Retrieved from www.nasponline.org.*

School Safety and Crisis Resources. *National Association of School Psychologists* Retrieved from http://nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/index.aspx

US Secret Service and the Department of Education (2002). Threat Assessment in Schools: *A Guide To Managing Threatening Situations And To Creating Safe School Climates.*

School Safety Hotline: 877-723-2728

Pasco County Schools
Helping Students Reach Their Highest Potential

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A Guide for Educators Summer 2007