



Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety

K-12 Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM)

KEY AREAS FOR INQUIRY (INVESTIGATIVE THEMES)

• Motives

- May be a variety of motives for engaging in harmful behaviors, whether to self, others, or both
- Discovering the motivation for an individual engaging in concerning behaviors allows the team to better understand the individual's goals
- How far is the individual willing to go?
- Understanding motive can better assist the team in developing management strategies

• Communications

- Look for concerning, unusual, bizarre, threatening, or violent communications the individual made
- May provide information of grievance(s) or intended target(s)
- Others warned away
- Look at multiple modes of communication
- Leakage

• Inappropriate Interests

- Has the individual shown inappropriate or heightened interest in school attacks or attackers, mass attacks, or other types of violence
- Weapons/tactics
- Violent or extremist ideology
- Notoriety or fame

• Weapons Access

- Determine the individual's access to weapons (firearms, bladed weapons, explosives, other, or a combination of weapons)

• Stressors

- Has the individual experienced any setbacks, losses, or challenges
- Look at any current and former stressors
- Consider school, home, work, and other environments where the stressors may be occurring

• Emotional and Developmental Issues

- Is the individual dealing with anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide, or other mental wellness issues
- Behaviors exhibited by an individual with a diagnosed disorder need to be evaluated in the context of their diagnosis and baseline behavior

• Desperation or Despair

- Assess if the individual feels hopeless, desperate, or out of options
- Are last resort behaviors observable?

• Violence as an Option

- Does the individual think violence is the only way to address their grievance(s)?
- Do they view violence as necessary or acceptable?
- Have they used violence in the past to resolve problems?
- Do others support or encourage the individual to use violence (and consider if they are part of any on-line groups that may be encouraging this as well)?

• Concerned Others

- Assess whether others (parents, family members, friends, peers, teachers, employers) are worried about the individual
 - Have they taken any actions steps in response to their concerns?

- These concerns could include unusual, bizarre, or threatening statements, intimidating or aggressive acts, indications for planning an attack, suicidal ideations/gestures, or fixation on a specific target
- Other behaviors that may cause concern, but not indicate violence
 - Alcohol or drug use
 - Behavior changes (including academic performance)
 - Social habits, mood, physical appearance
 - Conflict with others
 - Withdrawal or isolation
- **Capacity to Carry Out Attack**
 - Determine if the individual's thinking and behavior is organized enough to carry out an attack
 - **Planning does not need to be elaborate (simply planning to take a weapon from home and inflicting harm at school is planning)*
- **Planning**
 - Targeted attacks are rarely sudden or impulsive acts, they are planned
 - Are there lists of potential targets, research tactics and materials to carry out an attack?
 - Evidence of surveillance and/or testing security responses
 - *Review the "Pathway to Violence" model as part of these considerations*
- **Consistency**
 - Are the individual's statements able to be corroborated with their actions and behaviors based on other investigative information you have
 - Are there inconsistencies? (If so, why?)
- **Protective Factors**
 - Part of the threat assessment process requires understating any positive and prosocial influences on an individual's life
 - Identify factors that may restore hope to the individual that feels defeated, desperate, or in a situation that feels impossible to overcome
 - Does the individual have any positive, trusting adult relationships the team can utilize?
 - Any emotional connections to friends or peers that can be utilized

Information adapted from the National Threat Assessment Center. (2018). *Enhancing school safety using a threat assessment model: An operational guide for preventing targeted school violence*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security. Available at: https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2020-10/USSS_NTAC_Enhancing_School_Safety_Guide.pdf