# Threats in School

**Casey Waletich – Hillsboro School District**
**Will Henson PsyD – 321insight**
**Skip Greenwood PhD – 321insight**

# Today's Objectives

- **Develop an understanding of Threat Assessment and Threat Management best practices in schools.**

- **Increase your school/district's organizational readiness to identify, assess, and mitigate threats of potential violence posed to staff and students.**

# Key Points

- THREAT ASSESSMENT: Is about identifying and assessing threats of *TARGETED VIOLENCE.* A threat of violence posed by a student/person targeted at a specific person or group of people.

- THREAT MANAGEMENT: Is the process of mitigating identified threats so they do not result in violence. The outcome of a threat assessment is always a Safety Plan.

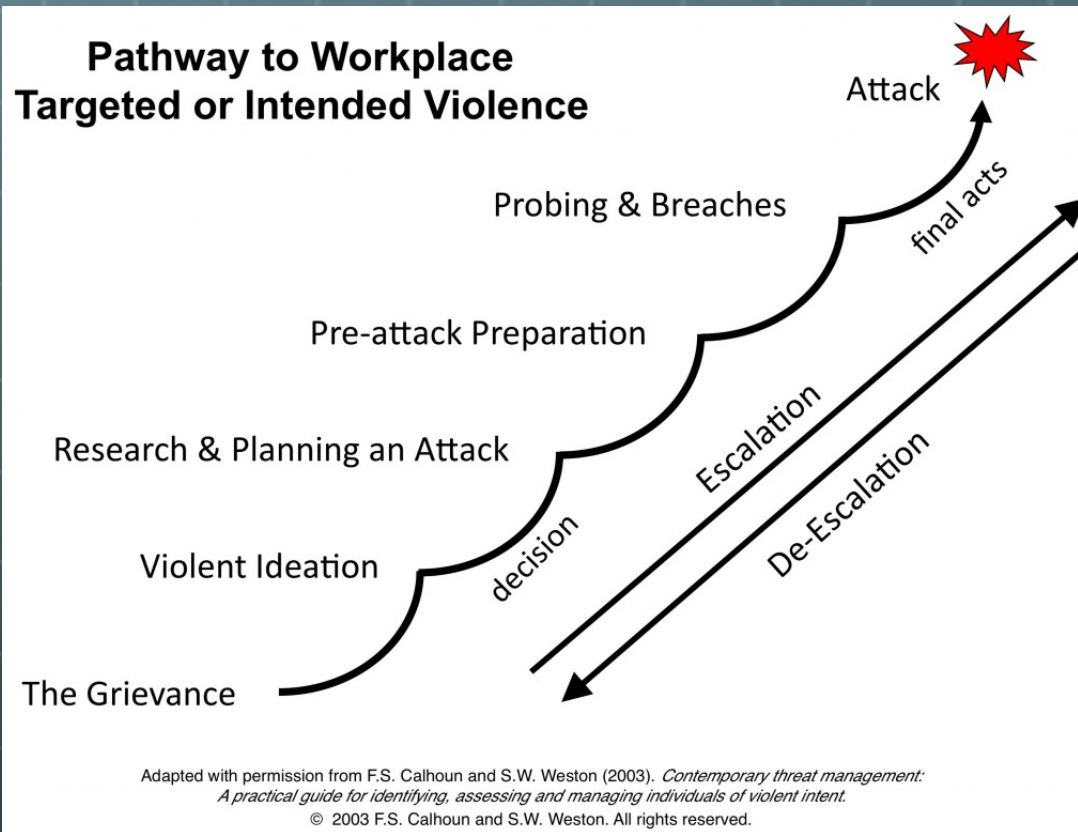- These tasks often fall upon a school administrator

# Threat Assessment BASICS

- **NOT PREDICTIVE:** Threat Assessment does not tell you if someone is going to act on a threat. It helps you develop a Safety Plan.

- **NOT DISCIPLINE:** Discipline is a separate but parallel process.

- **NOT ABOUT:** Reactive violence, suicide, sexualized behavior unless it contains a component of targeted threat.

- **NOT ONLY** School Shooters and mass casualty events

# Facts about Violence

- Violence is a PATHWAY – People don't just snap.  It is part of an unfolding and dynamic process from ideation to action.

- Violence risk is dynamic:  A person's capacity for violence is an interaction between
  - The individual
  - The situation
  - The target

THUS IT CAN CHANGE QUICKLY
(A THREAT ASSESSMENT DONE 3 MONTHS AGO MAY NOT BE VALID)

# Pathway to Violence



Pathway to Workplace Targeted or Intended Violence

- Attack
- Probing & Breaches
- Pre-attack Preparation
- Research & Planning an Attack
- Violent Ideation
- The Grievance

final acts
Escalation
De-Escalation
decision

Adapted with permission from F.S. Calhoun and S.W. Weston (2003). *Contemporary threat management: A practical guide for identifying, assessing and managing individuals of violent intent.*
© 2003 F.S. Calhoun and S.W. Weston. All rights reserved.

# Posing vs. Making A Threat

- Not all threats are explicitly stated.

- Threats can be vague ("Someone is going to pay.")

- Conditional ("If I get an F, I'm going to kill someone!"

- Indicated by the behavior (A student is attempting to acquire a gun, following a peer etc...)

# Which student is more concerning?

## STUDENT A

- Student A is in a behavior classroom. He is easily upset by work expectations and has daily anger outbursts. On five previous occasions he has stated he wants to "Go Columbine" on the school. He usually retracts this after he calms down.

## STUDENT B

- Student B is very angry with a peer a female peer who humiliated him in an online interaction. Yesterday afternoon he rode the peer's bus and followed her to her home. The student's parents called the school to report the incident.

# Your Answer?

## Student A

- Exhibits a base line of behavior that has not changed over time

- Demonstrates transient expressions of violence but no sustained ideation

- Shows remorse

## Student B

- Has a significant risk factor (loss of face)

- Demonstrates unclear intention but possible violence

- Demonstrates planning and predatory behavior

# *WHAT MAKES US SAFER?*

- People tend to do what they know in the face of a Threat:
    - Administrators discipline and suspend.
    - Police charge, arrest
    - Special educators change the IEP, implement behavior plans.
    - Mental health counsel, refer, make no-harm contracts

    - NONE OF THESE ARE THREAT ASSESSMENT INTERVENTIONS.

# Best Practices

- Threat Assessment is a <u>process</u>. It does not happen by accident.

- Schools need to increase their organizational capacity to IDENTIFY, ASSESS and MITIGATE threats

- Polices and procedures that reflect best practices must be in place in the school. They cannot rely only on outside sources.

- Staff must receive training and have easy and ongoing access to information and expertise.

# Salem-Keizer Model

- The *Salem-Keizer* model was developed in the Salem-Keizer school district in 2004.    This model is used by Hillsboro, Beaverton, Tigard and many districts in Oregon.

- Recommended by the FBI.

- Team-based approach incorporates multiple disciplines and perspectives.  Prevents one group or person from making too many decisions

# Step 1: Administrative Inquiry

- STEP 1: Administrative Inquiry
  - Trained administrator collects and evaluates initial information to determine if there is reason to proceed to a formal (level 1) threat assessment.
  - Immediate action is taken if required for security.

- CRITERIA FOR MOVING TO A THREAT ASSESSEMENT
  - Threat is <u>credible</u> – not just transient anger, joking etc..
  - Threat is causing significant disruption in the school environment
  - Information is vague, unclear.

# A Recent Quote

*"We were concerned because the student started drawing violent pictures.  So, we took away his pens and his paper and he is not allowed to draw."*

# Inquiry Investigation

- Don't be in a rush to discipline. Discipline can shut down your source of information by alienating parents and students.  Get the facts first.

- Be aware that *suspending* a student, even expelling them may not make you safer.

- Be ready to take *immediate action* to make sure people are safe.  Don't hesitate.

- Get information from social media before it gets taken down.  Parents / kids will sanitize their social media accounts.

# Step 2: Level 1 Threat Assessment

- LEVEL 1 TEAM

- Minimum Team =
  - Mental Health
  - Administration
  - Law Enforcement
  - People who know the student.
  
  CLOSED PROCESS: This is not an evaluation. Consent is not required despite the word "assessment." Parent can be involved in providing information.

- Team goes through the Level 1 Protocol to determine what **RISK FACTORS** and mitigating factors are present.

- The outcome of a Threat Assessment is always a **SAFETY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

- May move to level 2 if more information and resources are needed.

- Consult with experts as needed during process

# Level 2 Threat Assessment Team

- A level 2 Team is a community based team that has MOUs in place to share information.

- Team meets regularly and has relationships to trust each other's knowledge and expertise.

- Team members access their information and come prepared to share.

- Team ready to meet on 24 hours notice or less

- HILLSBORO SCHOOL DISTRICT TEAM COMPOSITION
  - Administration / Safety Director
  - School Mental Health
  - Student Safety Director
  - Clinical Psychologist
  - Care Coordinator
  - Hillsboro Police
  - WA County Sheriff Deputy
  - Hillsboro Fire Department
  - Juvenile Probation
  - WA County Mental Health
  - Individuals with knowledge of student

# IDENTIFICATION

- **STAFF/STUDENTS/COMMUNITY NEED TO KNOW**
  - **What to report**
  - **How to report a threat**
  - **To whom to report directly**
  - **Concerning Indicators that are not specific threats**
  - **Information that requires immediate action**

# Threat Assessment

- Examination of **RISK FACTORS** for targeted violence.

- STATIC FACTORS = Never Change (History, mental health diagnosis)

- DYNAMIC FACTORS = Subject to change (Stressors, environment, target behavior)

# Safe Schools Initiative

US Secret Service & Department of Education 1999

- FINDINGS

- 1. Incidents rarely sudden, impulsive acts

- 2. Other people knew about the idea or plan in most cases.

- 3. Most attackers did not threaten targets directly

- 4. No accurate or useful "profile" of a school shooter

- 5. Most attackers had prior behavior that caused concern or signaled their need for help.

# Safe Schools Continued...

- 6. Most attackers had trouble coping with significant losses (people, relationships) or failures or loss of status.  Many had prior suicide attempts.

- 7. Many attackers felt bullied or persecuted or injured by others prior to the attack.

- 8. Most attackers had access to and had used a weapon prior to the attack.

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

- 10. Despite prompt response most incidents were stopped by other means (students, staff, shooter suicide).

# Violence Indicators

- Direct or indirect threats are not the only indicator.

- Novel aggression (new aggressive behavior)

- Energy Burst warning behavior

- Leakage of intent to others

- Concerning drawings, writings

- Fascination with shooters, murders

- Repetitive media viewing of certain actions

- "Pseudo –Commando" mentality

- Grudge collector

# Autism & Violence

- Having Autism does not make you <u>more</u> or <u>less</u> violent but does create a new set of challenges.

- About 1/3 of Threat Assessments from my personal clinical sample are students on the Autism spectrum.

- Students with Autism may;
  - Lack awareness of the social impact of their words and actions.
  - Be more specific in their details about harming someone.

# Autism continued

- Maintain a fixation on an individual or incident over time.

- Be fixated with something violent ; movies, video games etc..

- Respond to threat assessment questions literally "Have you ever thought about killing someone…"

- Lack facial expressions and appear flat and dissociated or odd.

# Threat Mitigation

- Creating a *Safety Management Plan* is the most important part of a Threat Assessment.

- Most failures in Safety Planning are in the follow through of the plan, not the assessment or design of the plan.

- Many students who make or pose threats may return to school and need long-term monitoring and mitigation.  Students may be special education students and or not commit and expellable offense.

# Elements of a Good Plan

- *Think in multiple dimensions*
  - Supervision
  - Communication
  - Skill Development of the Student
  - Referral
  - Supportive Interventions (counseling, check-in)
  - Ongoing monitoring (and watching for accelerants)
  - Staff training
  - Response to problems (e.g. non-compliance with plan)

# Safety Series Project

- **A Collaboration :**
  - 321insight 
  - Hillsboro School District
  - Beaverton School District

  - **Mission:** To enhance the organizational readiness of district personnel to identify, assess and mitigate threats with on demand information

# The Problem

- Most principals & school-based team members get only a few hours once a year on threat assessment.

- Many do not use this process often and thus are not aware of the procedures and nuances when the time comes.

- This creates missteps and delays at critical junctures

# Our Answer:

- Online short videos to train staff in threat assessment and threat management procedures.

- Essential information creates a "mini-training" that increases the effectiveness of staff managing the threat

- Accessibility of forms and training materials

- Coming Spring 2016