

The Secret Service Themes in Threat Assessment

Gather a variety of information from diverse sources. The Behavioral Threat Assessment (BTA) team should then review and assess the available information using the following key themes and questions:

- 1. WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE STUDENT'S MOTIVE(S) AND GOALS?**
 - a. What motivated the student to make the statements or take the actions that caused him or her to come to attention? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - b. Does the situation or circumstance that led to these statements or actions still exist? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - c. Does the student have a grievance or grudge? Against whom or what? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - d. How far does the student seem willing to go to achieve their goal/s? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - e. What efforts have been made to resolve the problem and what has been the result? Does the potential attacker feel that any part of the problem is resolved or see any alternative? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- 2. HAVE THERE BEEN ANY CONCERNING, UNUSUAL, OR THREATENING COMMUNICATIONS?**
 - a. What, if anything, has the student communicated to someone else (targets, friends, other students, teachers, family, others) or written in a diary, journal, class assignments or tests, text messages, photo or video sharing sites, or other social media concerning his or her ideas and/or intent? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - b. Do any communications suggest grievances, warnings, ideas, or intent to attack? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- 3. HAS THE SUBJECT SHOWN INAPPROPRIATE INTEREST IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?**
 - a. School attacks or school attackers? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - b. Firearms or other weapons of any kind (including recent acquisition of any relevant weapon)? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - c. Other incidents of mass violence (terrorism, workplace violence, mass murderers)? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- 4. DOES THE STUDENT HAVE ACCESS TO WEAPONS?**
 - a. Does the student have access to firearms, other weapons, or other means to carry out an attack (such as explosives, incendiary devices, bladed weapons, etc.)? This can be at home, from relatives, friends, etc. [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - b. Are home firearms or weapons stored safely? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- 5. DOES THE STUDENT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO CARRY OUT AN ATTACK?**
 - a. Does the students have ability with firearms, other weapons, or other means of attack (such as explosives, incendiary devices, bladed weapons, etc.)? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - b. How organized is the student's thinking, behavior or ability to plan? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- 6. HAS THE STUDENT ENGAGED IN ATTACK-RELATED BEHAVIORS SUCH AS PLANNING? THESE BEHAVIORS MIGHT INCLUDE:**
 - a. Developing an attack idea or evidence of any planning? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - b. Creating a list of individuals or groups? [Click here to enter text.](#)

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- c. Making efforts to acquire or practicing with firearms or weapons of any kind? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - d. Mapping, casing, or checking out possible sites and areas for attack? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - e. Rehearsing attacks or ambushes? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - f. Does the student have ability or training with firearms, other weapons, or other means of attack (such as explosives, incendiary devices, bladed weapons, etc.)? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - g. How organized is the student's thinking and behavior or ability to plan? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- 7. HAS THE STUDENT EXPERIENCED STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS, SUCH AS SETBACKS, CHALLENGES, OR LOSSES?**
- a. Has the student experienced a recent failure, loss, breakup of relationship, and/or loss of status? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - b. Is the student known to be having difficulty coping with a stressful event or events at school, at home, or in the community (bullying, coursework, friendships, romantic relationships, parents, siblings, jobs, etc.)? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - c. Are there supportive friends or family assisting the student to cope? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- 8. WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF AGE, SOCIAL, MENTAL, OR EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT?**
- a. Is the student's behavior outside the norm for their age, social, mental, or emotional development? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - b. Does the student take any medication? Explain. [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - c. Note: Behaviors exhibited by a student with a diagnosed disorder need to be evaluated in the context of that diagnosis and the student's baseline of behavior. Appropriate intervention planning should take place. [Click here to enter text.](#)
- 9. IS THE STUDENT EXPERIENCING DESPERATION, HOPELESSNESS, DESPAIR, OR SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AND GESTURES?**
- a. Is there information to suggest that the student is experiencing desperation, hopelessness, depression, and/or despair (any communications that are concerning)? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - b. Is the student now, or has the student ever been suicidal, or engaged in a suicidal gesture? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - c. Has the student engaged in other behavior or communication that suggests that he or she has considered ending their life? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - d. Is there any indication the student is experiencing hallucinations or delusions? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - e. How were previous feelings or behaviors managed and what resources were used? Are those resources available to the student now? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- 10. DOES THE STUDENT SEE VIOLENCE AS ACCEPTABLE – OR DESIRABLE (OR THE ONLY WAY) TO SOLVE PROBLEMS?**
- a. Has the student used violence in the past to solve problems? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - b. Does the setting around the student (friends, fellow students, parents, teachers, adults) explicitly or implicitly support or endorse violence as a way of resolving problems or disputes? [Click here to enter text.](#)
 - c. Has the student been “dared” by others or “dared” others to engage in an act of violence? [Click here to enter text.](#)

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11. IS THERE CONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE STUDENT'S STATEMENTS AND THEIR BEHAVIORS?

- a. Does information from collateral interviews and from the student's own behavior or communication confirm or dispute what the student says is going on? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- b. Attempt to determine reasons for inconsistency. Is it deliberate or does it stem from other issues? [Click here to enter text.](#)

12. ARE OTHER PEOPLE CONCERNED ABOUT THE STUDENT'S STATEMENTS, BEHAVIORS, OR POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE?

- a. Are there examples of concerning or bizarre statements, ideas, thoughts, or behaviors? Get specific information. [Click here to enter text.](#)
- b. Are those who know the student concerned that the student might take some action based on violent ideas or plans? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- c. Are those who know the student concerned about a specific target? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- d. Have those who know the student witnessed recent changes or escalations in mood and behavior? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- e. Are other concerns noted, such as alcohol or drug use, behavioral changes related to academic performance, social habits, mood, physical appearance, conflicts with others, withdrawal or isolation, etc.? [Click here to enter text.](#)

13. DOES THE STUDENT HAVE POSITIVE OR PROSOCIAL INFLUENCES AND EVENTS?

- a. Does this student have a positive, trusting relationship with at least one adult at school? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- b. Is the student emotionally connected to – or disconnected from – other students? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- c. Does the student have prosocial connections or activities at school or in other areas of their life? [Click here to enter text.](#)
- d. Has the student previously come to someone's attention or raised concern in a way that suggested he or she needs intervention or supportive services? [Click here to enter text.](#)

Use the information related to these themes and questions to determine the seriousness of the threat or behaviors and the elements of an appropriate action and support plan best suited to this student and situation.

Attach this completed form to the Behavioral Threat Assessment (BTA) Documentation Form.

For consultation at any time please contact your designated supervisor.

Adapted from:

National Threat Assessment Center. (2018). *Enhancing school safety using a threat assessment model: An operational guide for preventing targeted school violence*. U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security.

https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/USSS_NTAC_Enhancing_School_Safety_Guide_7.11.18.pdf

Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and to creating safe school climates*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools Program and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center. A complete copy of the guide is available online at <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf>