

## Forms for the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

### **What is the purpose of these forms?**

These forms are used to conduct a threat assessment, as explained in the manual, *Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines: Intervention and Support to Prevent Violence*<sup>1</sup>, or other training resources.

### **Do I conduct a threat assessment for all threats?**

No. It is not feasible or necessary to conduct a formal assessment for clearly insignificant behavior such as playful bantering or joking. Conduct a threat assessment if there is some reason to be concerned about the behavior. When in doubt about a threat, conduct a threat assessment.

### **Do I use all of these forms for every threat assessment case?**

No. Transient cases are documented with only a few pages (Threat Report, Interview(s), Key Observations, Threat Response), whereas only very serious substantive threats are likely to use all of the forms. In large samples, approximately 75% of cases are transient and fewer than 10% are very serious substantive threats.

### **Do I complete every section of each form?**

No. These forms are intended as guidelines to help you consider the most likely aspects of a case, but you will use your judgment as to what is appropriate for your assessment and intervention.

### **Who completes the forms?**

Threat assessment is a team process and can be documented by any member of the team. A transient threat might be handled by just one team member (preferably in consultation with at least one other team member), whereas a substantive threat will likely engage several team members.

### **Can I modify these forms?**

Yes, within reasonable limits that do not significantly alter the CSTAG process. Be sure that changes are approved by your school system. Some school systems will modify the terminology (e.g., ‘safety screening’ versus ‘mental health assessment’) or make other adjustments. For example, some schools systems add a place to document who carries out each step of the assessment or add a form to track changes when a student receives ongoing services. Schools can use online versions of these forms, too.

### **If a threat is resolved, do I change the threat classification to “no threat”?**

No. The threat classification reflects your initial assessment and guides your next steps, regardless of how the threat is resolved. Occasionally, the threat classification might change if you find, for example, that a transient case is more serious than you thought and should be changed to a substantive threat. The resolution of a threat should be recorded in the Case Plan section.

### **Should I document transient threats?**

Yes. If a student later carries out a threat that was previously judged to be transient, you will want documentation to show that you made a defensible effort to assess the threat. If a student makes multiple threats, documentation will provide a useful perspective.

### **Where should I file these forms?**

Follow the guidance of your school system to determine where you file records. Some school systems choose to file some or all of the threat assessment forms in the student’s educational record and others choose to file some or all of the forms outside of the educational record. Any information placed in the student’s educational record is subject to FERPA restrictions.

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<sup>1</sup> The manual is available from School Threat Assessment Consultants LLC at <https://www.schoolta.com/manual> and from Amazon.com.

# THREAT ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE PROTOCOL®

Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

## OVERVIEW

A threat is a communication of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, written, gestured, or expressed in some other form, such as via text messaging, email, or other digital means. An expression of intent to harm someone is considered a threat regardless of whether it is communicated to the intended target(s) and regardless of whether the intended target is aware of the threat. Threats may be implied by behavior that an observer would reasonably regard as threatening, planning, or preparing to commit a violent act. When in doubt, treat the communication or behavior as a threat and conduct a threat assessment. Threats that are not easily recognized as harmless (e.g., an obvious joke that worries no one) should be reported to the school administrator or other team members. The administrator or another team member makes a preliminary determination of the seriousness of the threat. The student, targets of the threat, and other witnesses should be interviewed to obtain information using this protocol. A *transient* threat means there is no sustained intent to harm and a *substantive* threat means the intent is present (or not clear) and therefore requires protective action. This form is a guide for conducting a threat assessment, but each case may have unique features that require some modification.

A threat assessment is not a crisis response. If there is indication that violence is imminent (e.g., person has a firearm at school or is on the way to school to attack someone), a crisis response is appropriate. Take immediate action such as calling 911 and follow the school crisis response plan.

## School Threat Assessment Decision Tree\*

### Step 1. Evaluate the threat.

Obtain a detailed account of the threat, usually by interviewing the person who made the threat, the intended victim, and other witnesses. Write the exact content of the threat and key observations by each party. Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the student's intentions. Is there communication of intent to harm someone or behavior suggesting intent to harm?

No →

Not a threat. Might be an expression of anger that merits attention.

Yes ↓

### Step 2. Attempt to resolve the threat as transient.

Is the threat an expression of humor, rhetoric, anger, or frustration that can be easily resolved so that there is no intent to harm? Does the person retract the threat or offer an explanation and/or apology that indicates no future intent to harm anyone?

Yes →

Case resolved as transient; add services as needed.

No ↓

### Step 3. Respond to a substantive threat.

For all substantive threats:

- Take precautions to protect potential victims.
- Warn intended victim and parents.
- Look for ways to resolve conflict.
- Discipline student, when appropriate.

Serious means a threat to hit, fight, or beat up whereas very serious means a threat to kill, rape, or cause very serious injury with a weapon.

Serious →

Case resolved as serious substantive threat; add services as needed.

Very Serious ↓

### Step 4. Conduct a safety evaluation for a very serious substantive threat.

In addition to a-d above, the student may be briefly placed elsewhere or suspended pending completion of the following:

- Screen student for mental health services and counseling; refer as needed.
- Law enforcement investigation for evidence of planning and preparation, criminal activity.
- Develop safety plan that reduces risk and addresses student needs. Plan should include review of Individual Educational Plan if already receiving special education services and further assessment if possible disability.



### Step 5. Implement and monitor the safety plan.

Document the plan.  
Maintain contact with the student.  
Monitor whether plan is working and revise as needed.

\*This 5-step decision tree is a revision of the original 7-step decision tree for the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines that retains the same information and procedures in a more condensed format.