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CREATING EFFECTIVE RURAL SCHOOL BASED THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS

BY

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CAMPUS ALBERTA APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY:

COUNSELLING INITIATIVE

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RURAL SCHOOL BASED THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS

submitted by **Brenda Bryson** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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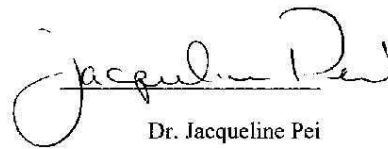
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COUNSELLING INITIATIVE

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ABSTRACT

School-based multidisciplinary threat assessment teams have emerged in the literature as an innovative process for evaluating and managing threats of violence in schools. The following project provides an historical review of threat assessment literature, a review of findings and recommendations from interviews conducted with threat assessment team members in a rural Albertan school division and culminated in the creation of a threat assessment team training manual for rural school divisions.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION.....	1
General Introduction	1
Project Rationale.....	4
Project Overview	6
CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Historical Record of the Development of Threat Assessment.....	7
<i>Defining School Based Threat Assessment</i>	7
<i>Youth Violence Rates</i>	7
<i>Evolution of Risk Assessment to Threat Assessment</i>	11
<i>Evolution of American School Based Threat Assessment</i>	15
<i>History of Canadian Threat Assessment Protocols</i>	31
Research on Use of Threat Assessment Models in Schools	40
<i>Field Test Use</i>	40
<i>Single Case Research</i>	41
School Violence Prevention Initiatives.....	42
<i>Visible School Protection Programs</i>	42
<i>Zero Tolerance Policies</i>	44
<i>Violence Prevention Programs</i>	44
<i>Threat Assessment as an Intervention</i>	47
Conclusion.....	48
CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY	50
Review of the Literature	50

Threat Assessment Team Study.....	50
<i>Guiding Research Question</i>	50
<i>Purpose</i>	51
<i>Ethics Approval</i>	51
<i>Participants</i>	51
<i>Interviews</i>	52
<i>Procedures</i>	52
CHAPTER IV – RESULTS.....	54
Multidisciplinary Teams	54
<i>Development of Effective Multidisciplinary Teams</i>	55
<i>Implementation and Management Considerations</i>	63
<i>Common Barriers to Effective Teams</i>	66
<i>Most Effective Intervention to Increase Efficacy of Multidisciplinary Teams</i>	70
The Shift from Violence Prediction to Threat Assessment	70
Improving Prediction Accuracy in Risk Assessment.....	71
<i>Goal Agreement and Use of Data</i>	71
<i>Timeframes and Access to Resources</i>	72
<i>Communicate Limits of Competence</i>	73
<i>Interviewer Bias</i>	73
<i>Systematic Approach to Implementation</i>	74
<i>Identify and Secure Data</i>	74
<i>Data Accuracy</i>	74
Summary.....	74

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	76
Implications.....	76
Strengths and Limitations	78
<i>Interview Findings</i>	78
<i>TAT Training Manual</i>	79
Future Research Directions.....	80
Conclusions.....	82
REFERENCES	84
APPENDIX A – ETHICS INTERIM APPROVAL CERTIFICATE.....	95
APPENDIX B – INSTRUMENT 1: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE.....	96
APPENDIX C – THREAD ASSESSMENT TEAM INTERVIEW GUIDE	97
APPENDIX D – RECRUITMENT NOTICE.....	98
APPENDIX E – INFORMED CONSENT.....	99
APPENDIX F – TRAINING MANUAL.....	100

CHAPTER I

Introduction

General Introduction

Targeted school violence is a rare event but one that deeply impacts communities and countries. The implementation of threat assessment protocols for addressing school targeted violence where the school is the chosen site of a targeted attack (Fein, Vossekuil, & Holden, 1995; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002) emerged, in part, as a response to school shootings in the United States and in Alberta. The tragic school shooting at Red Lake High, Minnesota (Harding & Walton, 2005) and the resulting media coverage illustrate that targeted school violence continues to be a concern to students, parents, and communities. The creation of school-based threat assessment teams has emerged as an integral part of critical response and preventative safety planning in Alberta school divisions.

Threat assessment has emerged as an alternative to traditional risk assessment approaches that attempt to predict the chance that a given person will act violently at some time in the future. Risk assessment has changed over the years from first generation research that consisted of an unstructured clinical interview to assess risk for violence that yielded accuracy rates of less than one in three (Monahan, 1981). Second generation risk assessments focused on historical (static) factors evaluated through the use of clinical interviews and or actuarial assessments. Accuracy continued to improve with third generation risk assessment tools that incorporated the evaluation of both static and dynamic risk factors to evaluate risk for violence. Threat assessment differs in scope and function from traditional risk assessment. Threat assessment is a process of determining if a threat maker actually poses a risk to the target or targets that they have threatened. Similar to third generation risk

assessments, threat assessment involves collection of historical data, consideration of contextual factors, and structured interviews to assess initial levels of risk that may be posed and to apply the knowledge to the creation of risk reducing interventions (Cameron & Sawyer, 2001; 2004).

A review of current threat assessment literature suggests that effective assessment of threats made by students is best done using a multidisciplinary approach that includes school personnel (school administrator, school district representative, school counsellor, teachers), law enforcement officers, community mental health workers, and child welfare workers (Cole, 2003; Fein et al., 2002; O'Toole, 2000; Sawyer & Cameron, 2001; Williams & Heinrich, 2002). Threat assessment team models are being utilized in several southern Alberta school divisions including Livingstone Range (Lorenz, 2001), Foothills (Foothills, 2004), Horizon, and Grassland but no studies have been published to date on efficacy of the models or on changes in rates of youth violence in schools. Benefits reported in the literature on the threat assessment team approach to violence include increased dialogue between youth service providers, increase in access to intervention of at-risk students, and avoidance of unfairly labeling non-violent students as potentially dangerous or lethal (McCann, 2002; Ryan-Arredondo et al., 2001; Williams & Heinrich). Key recommendations of the Safe School Initiative reports (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002), the Premier's Task Force Report on Children at Risk entitled "Start Young Start Now! Report of the Task Force on Children at Risk" (Government of Alberta, 2000), The Dallas Independent School District's Response to Threats of Violence in Schools (Ryan-Arredondo et al.), and reports from the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (as cited in O'Toole, 2000) support the development of threat assessment teams in schools.

School threat assessment procedures have developed primarily out of the research of the United States Secret Service in the area of assassination prevention and target protection (Fein, Vossekuil, & Holden, 1995; Fein & Vossekuil, 1998; Fein & Vossekuil, 1999) and of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (O’Toole, 2000). Threat assessment training has occurred across several Alberta school districts and the philosophy of the threat assessment approach reflected in school district safety handbooks and crisis management plans. Threat assessment training in Alberta schools began in a more comprehensive manner in response to the Taber School shooting in 1999. Mere weeks after the school shooting the government of Alberta created the Taber Response Project to study the effects of trauma on school and community systems. The need for protocols and best practice procedures for addressing threat making behaviours in schools emerged as a need. Kevin Cameron, who led the Crisis Response Team at the time of the Taber shooting and who was seconded to the Taber Response Project in conjunction with Deborah Sawyer, Threat Assessment Team Leader of Horizon School Division, created the document “Interim Protocol for Dealing with High Risk Student Behaviours”. This protocol was published as part of the 2000 Premier’s Task Force Report (Government of Alberta, 2000). Since that time several school divisions have trained staff members such as counsellors, administrators and staff on implementation of threat assessment protocols and threat assessment interviewing techniques. Little research has been conducted to assess the effect of threat assessment training on school division threat assessment practices nor a critical review of the theoretical basis for the threat assessment process as presented in threat assessment training programs and workshops. American school districts are also incorporating threat assessment approaches following recommendations made in the FBI document “The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective”

(O'Toole, 2000), "Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates" (Fein, Vossekuil, Pollack, Borum, Modzeleski, & Reddy, 2002), and the "The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative" (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). In order to assess the effect of school based threat assessment teams it would be useful if a specific protocol or set of team training standards existed to unify the concept of what constitutes a threat assessment team and the roles and responsibilities of varied members. Little empirical research is available, as yet, in the area school-based threat assessment (McCann, 2002; O'Toole, 2000; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000).

Project Rationale

The purpose of this project is to outline the origins of school-based threat assessment and multidisciplinary threat assessment teams by examining the evolution of the models in the literature, by reviewing the threat assessment policies of the Livingstone Range School Division # 68, and by interviewing members of school-based threat assessment teams resulting in a training manual for the creation and implementation of effective threat assessment teams in rural Alberta school divisions. The division that the guide will be specifically created for is Livingstone Range School Division but the content will be presented and designed with the intent of making the manual applicable to all rural Alberta school divisions. The manual will consist of several sections including:

1. A literature and historical record of the emergence of threat assessment teams in Alberta schools. The review will focus in particular on the literature that was used to support the creation of Kevin Cameron's Threat Assessment Workshops. The review will also

include an analysis of American and Canadian literature related to the use of threat assessment teams.

2. Guidelines for choosing members of the threat assessment teams and for getting outside agencies to commit to the process. This section will include locally relevant information in terms of available agencies and resources.
3. Training standard recommendations for team members based on the literature and from interviews with team members from Livingstone Range School Division threat assessment teams.
4. Suggestions for building team rapport and understanding including sample outlines for team development meetings.
5. Legal issues of concern in relation to having a multidisciplinary team including the School Act, confidentiality, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPP), the Youth Criminal Justice Act, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.
6. Annotated reference section of commonly used risk assessment tools for youth.

The creation of a threat assessment training manual provides the opportunity to consolidate the information available on creating effective threat assessment teams as well as providing a means to clarify roles and responsibilities of the multidisciplinary teams. This project extends the theory of threat assessment teams as a model into the practicalities of applying a model to a rural area with specific local needs and with limited professional resources. Livingstone Range School Division will benefit from this project as they will be able to use the manual for training purposes and to provide information for new team members. Other rural school divisions may also find the manual to be helpful when creating threat assessment teams.

Project Overview

The use of school-based threat assessment protocols has occurred in Canadian and American school districts over the past five years and is a relatively new area of study in the field of risk assessment and school violence. Careful review and evaluation of the development of threat assessment teams should be a priority to school divisions to ensure that teams are as effective as possible.

The second chapter provides a more detailed review of the key literature in the field of school threat assessment and risk assessment. This is followed in chapter three by a description of the methodology used when completing the literature review, interviews with threat assessment team members, and the development of the threat assessment training manual. Results of both the interviews with team members and of the creation the training manual are included in chapter four. Chapter five concludes the project by discussing the implications of the project, the strengths and weaknesses of the information and manual created, as well as suggestions for areas of future research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Historical Record of the Development of Threat Assessment

Defining School Based Threat Assessment

Threat assessment is a term developed within the United States Secret Service to describe a process of identifying, assessing, and managing the threat presented by an individual toward a Secret Service client (Fein et al., 2002; O'Toole, 2000). In the case of targeted school violence, the target may include a specific student, teacher, group of individuals, or the school itself (Fein et al.; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum & Modzeleski, 2002). Implicit in the term threat assessment is the effective use of interventions emphasizing prevention as the ultimate outcome (Reddy et al., 2001) as opposed to risk assessment where the implied outcome is predictive accuracy of the potential for a person to commit a particular act.

Youth Violence Rates

For comparison purposes, research statistics for both Canada and the United States were included in this review. The rates of school violence in the United States were reviewed by Kingery, Coggeshall, and Alford (1998). Their study analyzed results of four national American surveys administered in 1995: the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance-United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997), the Monitoring the Future Survey (Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 1987-1997), the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Carolina Population Center, 1997), and the National Crime Victimization Survey School Crime Supplement (U.S. Department of Justice & Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1998). The data from these surveys indicated a decline in youth violence and homicides in

the United States. From specific survey question results, Kingery, Coggeshall, and Alford identified risk factors for students carrying weapons to school and established the level of victimization, perpetration and fear present within American schools. These authors discussed the difficulty in obtaining accurate information regarding youth violence in schools and the problem of underreporting often due in part to survey tools that do not allow for anonymity in reporting. The majority of American students in Grade 9 reported feeling safe in their schools (90.6% of boys, 97% of girls) although 8.9% of Grade 9 boys and 9.4% of girls fear attack or harm at school “sometimes or most times” (Kingery, Coggeshall & Alford, p. 251). The decrease in youth violence reported in these 1995 surveys has continued in subsequent years (U.S. Department of Justice & Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999). The Canadian Public Health Association in conjunction with the National Crime Prevention Strategy (2004) completed a survey of select schools across Canada. In that survey students reported feeling safe *sometimes* at school 13% of the time and five per cent indicated that they *never or hardly ever felt safe at school*, this result was consistent between genders (p.26).

There are several similarities and differences between youth violent crime rates in Canada and the United States. Canada Corrections Uniform Crime Report Survey statistics show that rates of male youth violent crime in Canada have remained fairly constant at about 1.37 % from 1995 to 2001 and youth homicide rates have declined from .52 per 10,000 in 1991/1992 to .38 per 10,000 in 1996/1997 (Sinclair & Boe, 1998). Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas (2000) reported that the number of violent deaths in U.S. school settings has decreased from 1992 until 2003 but from 1995 to 1999 there has been an increase in the number of violent incidents involving multiple victims. The most common rate of violence at

school quoted in the literature states school violence resulting in death has remained an uncommon event accounting for less than 1% of youth deaths in the United States (McCann, 2002; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas). Although both countries' statistics support that youth violent crime and homicides are decreasing in frequency in both the United States and Canada, youth homicide rates between the countries are significantly different. Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber (1995) compared youth homicide rates over a 25 year period from 1965-1990 and found that the rates of homicide for American youth is nine times higher than their Canadian counterparts. It must be acknowledged that the base rate of youth homicide for both countries is considered to be statistically low (Mulvey, & Cauffman, 2001; O'Toole, 2000) therefore, the likelihood exists that for every true positive prediction of youth homicidal behaviour there will also be a large number of false positives (Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Hart, Webster, and Menzies, 1993). Within the school setting, false positive predictions of violent or homicidal behaviour carry inherent ethical and legal risks of potentially stigmatizing and restricting opportunities for youth (Burns, Dean, & Jacob-Tim, 2001; Mulvey & Cauffman). Despite the low rate of violence leading to homicides in schools, fear of violence at student, teacher, parent and community levels has led to a push for greater accountability of school systems in Canada and the United States to demonstrate the utilization of tools and measures to decrease the probability of school targeted violence.

Fear expressed by Americans about school violence is high compared to the actual probability of harm and Reddy et al. (2001) found the literature attributed this fear in part to the extensive media coverage of incidents of targeted school violence (Henry, 2000; Herd-Rapp, 2003; McCann, 2002; Menifield, Rose, Homa, & Cunningham, 2001; O'Toole, 2000; U.S. Department of Education & U. S. Department of Justice, 1999). One review of violence

indicated that youth crimes were actually lower during the school day, spiked at the end of school and decreased throughout the evening hours (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999) which suggested that schools remain one of the safest places for students during school hours (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001).

Rates of school violence and school deaths have continued to decline over the past ten years in both Canada and the United States, however, highly publicized incidents of school targeted violence such as the shootings at Red Lake and Columbine heighten the fears and anxieties of students, parents and communities. Despite the low base rate of these events there is continued interest in the development of interventions and assessments that are likely to not only reduce the probability of future school targeted violence but school violence in general. Events such as the Red Deer incident of three students poisoning a fellow student by putting copper (II) sulphate in her slurpee (“Slushie Trio”, 2003) and incidents of “swarming” of students in high schools also illustrate the importance of violence prevention interventions that address the range of violent behaviours reported in schools today.

The predictors and antecedents of youth aggression have been studied extensively and criteria for identifying at risk children and youth are common in the literature (Ellickson & McGuigan, 2000; Hawkins et al., 1998; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998), what is less common is empirically based predictors of school targeted violence. Much of the research on creation of tools or models of risk prediction has focused on measurement of the potential for youth violence as opposed to school targeted youth violence. Case study research of students that have committed school targeted violence suggests that these perpetrators not only lack many of the common risk factors for violence recidivism and delinquency in youth (for a summary

of common factors see Cole, 2003) but also differ from juveniles that have committed homicides that were not school targeted (Reddy et al., 2000).

Evolution of Risk Assessment to Threat Assessment

Risk assessment is valued for its predictive ability to identify potential perpetrators of violence, unfortunately as Borum (1996) related, the accuracy of first generation risk assessments designed to gather information on largely static historical factors have simply not been validated in the research. Borum's synopsis of historical studies on accuracy of risk assessment showed that from the time of Monahan's (1981) comprehensive review of risk assessment accuracy that found psychiatrists and psychologists are accurate no more than one time out of three (Dawes, 1989; Otto, 1992), the field of study has improved to the point that by the mid-1990s mental health professionals were accurate in one out of two short term predictions of future violence (Monahan & Steadman, 1994; Mossman, 1994). This second generation of risk assessments involved the use of a combination of actuarial risk assessment tools in combination with structured clinical interviews. Third generation risk assessment included the evaluation of static factors that primarily relate to historical risk factors and dynamic factors including relationships, social skills, attitude, motivation and other factors subject to fluctuation and change based on contextual factors (Naude, 2003). The static and dynamic factors are considered within a theoretical frame such as social learning theory with the intent of forming predictions of specific outcomes within a specific timeframe and with a specified population. Each level of risk assessment has limits to accuracy and generalizability. Overall, actuarial tools are considered more reliable when compared to clinical judgment (Reddy et al, 2000; Monahan & Steadman, 1996) however, one risk assessment study (Fuller & Cowan, 1999) used multidisciplinary clinical judgments to assess

risk of violence and achieved prediction accuracy that was better than chance in short to medium risks. Multidisciplinary clinical judgment allowed for the consideration of local contextual factors and was viewed by the researchers as an important adjunct to actuarial tools. In the case of school targeted violence, low base rates of the behaviour, and the range of contextual factors that influence the decision for a student to carry out a threat, has limited the development of actuarial tools specific to school threat assessment.

Four assessment approaches reviewed by Reddy, Borum, Vossekuil, Fein, Berglund, and Modzeleski (2001) highlighted the differences between risk assessment approaches and a threat assessment approach. The four risk assessment approaches of profiling, guided professional judgment, and automated decision making used in some jurisdictions were considered flawed (Reddy et al.). Profiling as a method of identifying potential students capable of targeted school violence carries a significant risk of false positives, has a potential for bias, and creates the possibility of denying students their civil rights as well as potentially stigmatizing the student. A further concern of profiling in the case of targeted school violence is that the profiles used are based on school shooter profiles that are empirically questionable. For instance, McGee and DeBernardo (1999) compiled a *classroom avenger* profile that erroneously identified all past shooters as being white males. This inaccuracy emphasizes the importance of ascertaining the sources used to create profiles (Henry, 2000). The study of school shooters by Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas (2000) made extensive use of news accounts of shootings to obtain data, some of which is disputed in other more comprehensive studies where researchers had access to documents and reports not available to the media (O'Toole, 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2002).

Structured clinical assessments of risk involve the use of guided professional judgment during a structured interview and evaluation of the individual and rely on the assessor having knowledge of dynamic risk factors appropriate to the student's social and demographic situation. Checklists or other instruments are used in conjunction with the structured interview to assess risk by comparing the individual's responses to a preset list of risk factors based on the individual's population. The difficulty with this approach to targeted school violence is that the base rates are so low that all risk assessment ratings would fall in the low range due to the statistical unlikelihood of the event occurring despite the presence of significant risk factors (Sewell & Mendelsohn, 2000). Another important consideration is that the majority of risk assessment tools produced such as the PCL-YV (Forth, Kossen, & Hare, 2003) were developed for use for with forensic populations and intended to be used as a source of information for sentencing agreements, parole hearings, and in general to assess the likelihood of future violence by individuals already possessing a history of violent behaviour. Tools such as the Early Assessment and Risk List for Boys (EARL 20B) (Augimeri, Koegl, Webster, & Levene, 2001) and the Early Assessment Risk List for Girls (EARL-21G) (Levene et al., 2001) were created to assess for violence risk in boys and girls under 12, then came the Structured Assessment for Violence in Youth (SAVRY) (Borum, & Bartel, 2002) for the adolescent population all three of which were developed in the tradition of the Historical/Clinical/Risk Management-20 (HCR-20)(Webster, Douglas, Eaves, & Hart, 1997) and were designed to assess risk for violence but with a focus on development of intervention plans to mitigate risk factors (Bloom, Webster, Hucker, De Freitas, 2005) placing them in the category of second and third generation risk assessment tools.

Researchers argue the validity of assuming that the risk factors for youth violence in general are even the same as the risk factors for targeted school violence (Borum, 1996). The *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States (SSI)* (Vossekuil et al., 2002) supported the supposition that risk factors for school shooters do not in fact share the same risk factors or match the traditional profile of a violent youth offender. A further limiting factor of guided professional judgment is reliance on standard psychological tests. A useful relationship between data obtained from psychological assessments and the risk of targeted violence in schools has not been established (Borum, 1996). A new assessment tool called the Dallas Violence Risk Assessment (DVRA) was developed based on literature and information from the National School Safety Center with the defined purpose of evaluating students who had made verbal or written threats of violence to assist staff with determining appropriate intervention strategies (Ryan-Arredondo et al., 2001). Data collected in the Dallas School District indicate that, over the 1999/2000 school year, the DVRA was administered to only 14 of 77 students reported for making threats. This indicated that the protocols for threats were not being followed and, therefore, data collected during the study was incomplete. Validity and reliability studies of the DVRA are under development so it is not possible to deign whether the DVRA may bridge the gap between actuarial and guided professional judgment interviews.

Automated decision-making assessment approaches include both actuarial formulas and use of artificial intelligence approaches. In order to create an effective actuarial tool, risk factors must be weighted as to their relationship to a particular outcome. Unfortunately, many of the actuarial tools used and computer ‘profiling’ programs are based on the

erroneous assumption that risk factors for general violence will also be true for predicting school targeted violence which is refuted in the comprehensive empirical SSI study (Vossekuil et al., 2002). Profiling, guided professional judgment, and automated decision making all rely on inductive reasoning and what may be required is a more deductive approach that focuses on facts of a particular case to guide inferences (Reddy et al., 2001).

Evolution of American School-Based Threat Assessment

Exceptional case study project. Several significant studies and acts of legislation propelled the creation of school threat assessment models in the United States. In 1992, the Secret Service initiated the Exceptional Case Study Project (ECSP), a five year project funded by the United States Department of Justice. The study completed a review of the behaviours of individuals who carried out or attempted lethal attacks on public or prominent officials in the United States. It is here that the term “targeted violence” was defined as a specific form of violence possessing identifiable characteristics and precursors, different from violence in general (Vossekuil et al., 2002). The United States Federal government continued to advocate for better knowledge of violence in schools as part of the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) by calling for comprehensive assessment of objective data related to the prevalence and type of violence and drug use in the nation’s schools (National Education Goals Panel, 1998). Educators then began to search for effective ways to both identify and provide effective intervention to reduce acts of student initiated violence (Ryan-Arredondo et al., 2001).

National threat and crime centers. Two other events in 1998 that contributed to the research field of threat assessment and school targeted violence were the creation of the National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) by the Secret Service and the initiation of a

research project by the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) (O'Toole, 2000). The National Threat Assessment Center was created as a means to share research and information about targeted violence gathered through the experiences and research of the Secret Services. This information was made specifically available to law enforcement personnel through the document "Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations: A Guide for State Law Enforcement Personnel" (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998).

Case study research. Case study research has focused on American school shootings and varies in depth and accuracy. Commonly referenced studies in the literature include the *Risk Factors in School Shootings* review completed by Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas (2000) and *The Classroom Avenger* by McGee and DeBernardo (1999). Verlinden and colleagues reviewed nine incidents of multiple homicides in American schools. This report provided a thorough review of the literature regarding individual, family, societal, and situational risk factors for youth violence as well as risk assessment methods. The study included a comparison of warning signs and risk factors published on youth violence resulting in a concise list of risk factors. Subsequent comprehensive studies of school shooters disputed the following characteristics named in the Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas study: troubled parent-child relationships, ineffective parenting, poor social and coping skills, and experience isolation and rejection from peers (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002). Another weakness of the study included the minimal explanation of the selection procedures that resulted in the nine cases chosen for review. These researchers did not have open access to all documents related to the individual shooters and used media reports as a means to obtain data which resulted in the inclusion of erroneous information in some cases, therefore, the resulting 'characteristics' of school shooters described must be viewed cautiously. Areas

for further research were clearly identified by the authors and included recommendations for more specific studies on risk factors and protective factors for specific forms of violence, a need to develop risk assessment tools, and studies assessing why youth often do not report threats of violence made by peers.

The McGee and DeBernardo (1999) analysis possessed similar methodological flaws and inaccuracies to the Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas (2000) study revealed after the Secret Service conducted more in depth case study reviews (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002). The *Classroom Avenger* behavioural profile was prepared after a review of twelve select school shootings that occurred in the United States. Unconfirmed information reported in police reports, and information reported in the media was used by the authors in the creation of their profiles due to limited access to forensic information, and first hand sources (McGee & DeBernardo). The small data base, unconfirmed facts, and lack of access to critical information specific to the individual shooters rendered the profiles unreliable and potentially harmful if used to label students inappropriately.

Four-prong threat assessment model. The NCAVC research project conducted by the FBI (O'Toole, 2000) involved the analysis of eighteen current incidents of school shootings in the United States. From the data derived in the research project and information gained during the Leesburg symposium a guide titled: *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective* was released. This document defined what constitutes a threat in a school environment, provided a continuum to assess severity of a threat and a four-pronged assessment model that focused on the personality and behaviour of the student, family dynamics, school dynamics and social dynamics (O'Toole). This form of dynamic

assessment involved both the gathering of historical data from multiple sources as well as suggested interview questions.

For each “prong” (p. 15) of the assessment model, specific traits, guidelines, examples, and signs to watch for are provided but readers are cautioned not to prematurely label a student based on information on only one prong, or by assuming behaviours as significant without establishing a baseline of behaviour. Some of the traits identified for each prong may be due to other causes such as depression, substance abuse, or other mental health problems and if suspected, the author recommends the student should be referred for an additional mental health assessment.

Prong one of the report identified several personality traits and behaviours as potentially significant to indicating whether a student may pose a threat for violence including “leakage” (O’Toole, 2000, p.16) defined as the intentional or unintentional sharing of “feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, boasts, innuendoes, predictions, or ultimatums.” (p. 16). Twenty seven other traits are listed including low self-esteem, feelings of alienation, intolerance, anger management problems, tendency to externalize blame, and drawn to negative role models.

The second prong of assessment lists the following family dynamics as potential warning signs: conflicted relationship with parents, parental acceptance of pathological behaviour, easy access to weapons, lack of family intimacy, frequent or recent moves, few boundaries set by parent, and few limits or poor monitoring of TV or Internet.

The third prong focuses on school dynamics and identifies poor school attachment, school tolerance of disrespectful behaviours, perception of unjust discipline, static and inflexible culture, unequal recognition of student groups, unsupervised access to computers,

and a closed climate where students feel unsafe telling staff about concerns regarding student behaviours.

The last prong focuses on understanding the social environment of the student noting particular interest in violent media, identification with peer groups espousing violence or extremist beliefs, patterns of drug and alcohol use, and potential susceptibility to copycat behaviours as a result of exposure to intense media coverage of violent incidents.

Many of the warning traits listed in the four-prong assessment model (O'Toole, 2000) are characteristics and traits encountered by staff and student in schools on a daily basis, yet most students that exhibit these signs do not engage in targeted school violence, and judicious care must be taken to avoid inaccurately labeling students as potentially violent (Borum, 2000; Catchpole & Gretton, 2003). The model clearly states that the signs are intended to be used only if a student poses a threat and not as a profiling tool for identifying potentially violent students and that a student needs to demonstrate a pattern of traits across the four prong areas. While the School Shooter report provides a significant amount of data related to potential warning signs of violence the checklist style format also creates the possibility for misuse by school personnel that are not trained in the gathering and evaluation of assessment information. The model also requires assessors to possess a strong understanding of child and youth development and strong guided clinical judgment skills (Reddy et al., 2000) to ascertain what qualifies as significant behaviours. Specific protocols, training standards, and more structured procedures are needed to move the model from theory to practice. The difficulty of applying the four-prong model without adequate training and regard to the establishment of district policies and procedures was highlighted in a single case study reported by Sacco and Larsen (2003).

Secret Service threat assessment. Secret Service threat assessment protocols provided a framework for “identifying, assessing, and managing persons who pose a risk for targeted violence” (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998; Reddy et al., 2000, p.167). Three principles guide the threat assessment process: violence is seen as the product of an interaction among the perpetrator, situation, target, and the setting; there is a distinction between making a threat and posing a threat; and targeted violence is not random or spontaneous (Fein & Vossekuil). Threat assessment approaches advocated within the Secret Service as a preventative strategy for reducing assassination attempts provided the framework for further research into how the threat assessment within school systems could be used to prevent targeted school violence (Fein et al, 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002). The threat assessment approach combines the use of structured clinical interview questions with available data known about precursors to targeted school violence versus reliance on general indicators of violence in youth.

The most comprehensive school shooting study completed to date was commissioned by the Safe School Initiative and its findings are reported in *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications For the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States* (Vossekuil et al., 2002) and the companion report *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates* (Fein et al., 2002). The methodology of the study was clearly described in the Final Report and met a high standard of research design. This study reviewed the 37 known incidents of targeted school violence in the U.S. from December 1974 to May 2000. The researchers had access as with the O’Toole (2000) study to extensive information and also included interviews with ten of the perpetrators of incidents of school violence. The key findings of the Final Report of the Safe School Initiative included:

- Incidents of targeted violence at school *rarely* were sudden, impulsive acts.
- Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack.
- Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to the attack.
- There is no accurate or useful 'profile' of students who engage in targeted school violence.
- Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.
- Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.
- Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted or injured by others prior to the attack.
- Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
- In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
- Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

(p. 18)

The key findings are included here to illustrate the similar findings of the three case study analyses completed to date with the exception of the finding that there is no useful profile of students who engage in school violence. Careful analysis of a student's behaviours and communications are more likely to yield useful information that may lead to a threat assessment and possible intervention than a 'profile' that may erroneously label students not likely to commit school violence. The lack of a shooter profile and the reality that the only common factor in all shootings was that the attacker was male is of particular importance to policy makers and educational systems that are implementing school prevention programs aimed at reducing the threat of school violence.

School-based risk assessment (SBRA). Halikias (2004) has proposed a model for assessing student risk of serious violence in schools that combines traditional risk assessment of with the Secret Service model of school targeted threat assessment (Fein et al, 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002). The SBRA reflects a "pragmatic and clinical" (Halikias, 2004, p.598) approach to school risk assessment that emphasizes the importance of social context when interpreting student behaviours and demonstrates the shift in focus from traditional

predictions of future violence potential and identification and punishment of violent behaviours to identification of potential intervention services and support for the student at risk of violence. The term “dangerousness” and “threat assessment” (p.599) are used by Halikias to differentiate between two types of students that may be referred for SBRA.

Students at risk for “dangerous” behaviour are defined as those students that have established previous patterns of anger management problems and violence, exhibit impulsive and explosive behaviours and may already be labelled with conduct or emotional disorders. A significant quantity of research has been conducted on this population to determine predictors of youth violence (Hawkins et al., 1998; Thornberry, Huizinga, & Loeber, 1995; Thornberry, 1998) and the data generated utilized in the creation of second generation risk assessments (Monahan & Steadman, 1996).

The second group of students is those discussed in the threat assessment literature. These students create plans for targeted school violence and information generated about this group was derived primarily from the research of the United States Secret Service through the Safe School Initiative (Fein et al., 2002; Vosekuil et al., 2002). Halikias (2004) utilizes the data on the two types of students to create a process for ensuring that school assessments result in the recommendation of interventions and case management strategies that are matched to the profile of the offender as either a student with a high risk for engaging in “dangerous” violence or school targeted violence.

In addition to using a contextual, dynamic interview approach adapted from Borum (1999) and the Safe School Initiative (Fein et al., 2002), Halikias also suggests a method for further categorizing students referred for SBRA based upon five hypothetical categories, shown in Table 1. These categories go beyond students that may be at risk for committing

targeted school violence to include all students at risk for committing violence. The primary factor used in the creation of the categories is the student’s motivation for committing the act. This factor is considered an important criterion for choosing the most effective intervention and case management strategies. The categories described by Halikias are not empirically determined or based on any proven classification system. Halikias explains the use of the categories as a way to discourage assessors from stereotyping students and as a means to help assessors to intentionally recommend interventions and strategies appropriate for the type of student referred.

Table 1

SBRA Categorizing Students That Commit Acts of Violence

Group	Characteristics/Motivation	Likely Intervention
Group A	Few emotional/conduct problems. Decision to assess more related to school climate than concern/fear.	Minimal school based intervention. Discussion with administration/counsellor.
Group B	Careless nonviolent student. Presenting behaviour seems thoughtless or isolated.	May require guidance and support around incident. Require less intensive/costly safety plans.
Group C	May have history of emotional or conduct problems. Precipitating incident indicates inadequate problem solving abilities. Developmental crisis underlies threat making threat or risky behaviour.	Require focused case management strategies aimed at lessening source of distress and problem solving deficits.

Group D	<p>May have history of emotional or conduct problems.</p> <p>Have specific plan and targets.</p> <p>Rehearse or practice elements of plan.</p> <p>Plan provides sense of purpose and power.</p> <p>Grievance often provides impetus to carry out planned attack.</p> <p>Often referred because attack information is told to someone.</p> <p>Includes the <i>violent true believer</i> (Meloy, 2001) homicidal and suicidal plans converge revolve around ideology/belief resulting in acts of terrorism.</p>	<p>Law enforcement likely involved.</p> <p>More extensive interviews of others and searches of students person and place.</p> <p>Require well documented and comprehensive safety plans to address motivations, provide support, and alternate problem-solving strategies.</p> <p>Often require supervision and restricted access to weapons.</p>
Group E	<p>Demonstrate dangerous and intimidating behaviour.</p> <p>History of psychological, developmental, or conduct problems.</p> <p>Critical incident related to larger pattern of inept coping strategies.</p> <p>Discipline, special education, or mental health files often exist.</p>	<p>Recommendations usually require comprehensive case management interventions.</p> <p>Justice involvement in process likely.</p> <p>Often results in recommendation of alternative education programs.</p>

Subgroup-students with history of
instrumental or predatory aggression
(psychopathic traits).

(Halikias, 2004).

The specific protocol suggested for the assessing psychologist mirrors the recommendations of the SSI (Fein et al., 2002) and the Cameron and Woods (2001; 2004) threat assessment process except the Halikias (2004) model is a unilateral assessment versus a multidisciplinary assessment. In the completion of a SBRA the psychologist is charged with reviewing the available historical information, conducting interviews with parents, staff, the student and collaterals. The psychologist then assesses the information and prepares a recommended management and intervention plan. This model represents an improvement over models that focus exclusively on school-targeted violence which represents a very small percentage of the actual violence committed in schools, it lacks however, a multidisciplinary collaborative approach to gathering, evaluating, and creating effective practical violence management plans. The model also lacks any significant discussion of how this model would be implemented within a school system or who would be responsible for costs. Many rural school systems in Alberta do not have staff psychologists, and access to mental health personnel with specialized training in youth violence risk assessment rare.

Table 2

Key Developments of Threat Assessment Protocols in Canada and the United States

DATE	INITIATIVE	AGENCIES	RELEVANCE
1992	Exceptional Case Studies Project	Secret Service US Dept. of Justice	Study of behaviour of individuals who have carried out or attempted attacks

			on public officials.
1994	Goals 2000: Educate America Act	Federal Legislation	Established national educational goals including requiring schools to be violence and gun free by year 2000.
1994	Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act(Section 7 of the Educate America Act)	Federal Legislation	Called for assessment of objective data of types and incidents of violence and drug use in schools. Influenced educators to identify ways to identify and intervene with students at risk of violent behaviour.
1997	Taber School Crisis Response Protocols	Taber Suicide Intervention Committee	Committee began process to create formal protocols for crisis response in schools. Resulted in formation of adjunct committee, Taber Response Team.
1997	In-service for Taber Schools administration and selected staff.	Taber Crisis Response Team	Participants exposed to crisis response model and demonstrations of crisis response scenarios.
1997- 1998	Report on State of Implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act	US Government	To get Federal funding for education state must enact legislation requiring one year expulsion for students that bring fire-arms to school.

1997-	Task Force on	Dallas Independent	Created risk assessment tool and
1998	School Violence	School District	completed study over one year of implementation.
1998	National Threat Assessment Center	Secret Service	National Threat Assessment Center created enabling access to research on threat assessment.
1998	NCAVC School Shooting Study	FBI National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC)	Completed review of 18 recent school shootings.
1998	Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools	US Dept. of Education US Dept. of Justice	Guide intended for schools to respond to threats and acts of violence.
1999	State of New York	State of New York	Initiated Project S.A.V.E.
January	Task Force on School Violence Established		Conducted surveys, interviews and public meetings to gather information about state of violence in schools in New York state.
1999	Columbine	Littleton,	13 victims killed.
April	Shooting	Colorado	Two assailants dead by suicide.
20 th			

1999 April 28th	Taber Shooting	Taber, Alberta	One student killed.
1999 May	Premier's Task Force on Children at Risk	Government of Alberta	Established to examine issues facing children at risk including those at risk of developing violent behaviour.
1999 May	Taber Response Project	Government of Alberta Sun Country Child and Family Services Authority	Established to review the events of the Taber shooting, to determine the impact of the event and to make recommendations about how to prevent and respond to crisis events.
1999 May	NCAVC Leesburg Symposium	FBI (National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime)	Symposium on school shootings including individuals from schools that participated in school shooting study.
1999 June	Safe School Initiative launched.	US Secret Service US Dept. of Education	Initiated comprehensive review of thirty seven incidents of targeted school violence from 1974-2000. Interim report released in 2000.
1999 Fall	Alberta Children's Forum	Government of Alberta Task Force on Children at Risk	Provincial Forum held with representatives from multiple agencies providing services for youth as well as parents and youth.

1999 October	Final Report of New York Task Force	State of New York	Two hundred and seventy page report released containing recommendations of ways to identify students at risk of preventing violence in schools. Recommendations included zero tolerance policies for violence, increased surveillance technology, and establishment of behavioural disciplinary policies.
2000 February	The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective	US FBI US Department of Justice	Proposed a threat assessment model to use in school settings.
2000	Report of the Task Force on Children at Risk	Government of Alberta	Recommendations for prevention of violence in children from birth to adulthood. Recommendations from the Taber Response Project including interim protocols for assessing and managing high risk student behaviours.
2001	Building Community Capacity for	Alberta Mental Health Board Alberta Education,	Ten month initiative to provide workshops for school divisions to assist in forming and improving

	Risk/Threat Assessment and Crisis Response	Solicitor General	multidisciplinary threat assessment and crisis response teams.
2001	Canadian Threat Assessment Training Board	Funded by Canadian Federal Justice Department Organized through Lethbridge Community College	Board received funding for collaborative threat assessment training project developed by Kevin Cameron and Superintendent Glenn Woods (Criminal Profiler, RCMP). Completed two day multidisciplinary threat assessment training beginning in the 2001-2002 school year. Models derived from primarily from FBI and Secret Service research.
2001	Canadian Council for Threat Assessment Training and Trauma Response	Federal “not-for-profit” corporation.	Non-regulatory body established to make available “recommended” standards and practices for professionals in threat assessment/trauma response fields. Dedicated to completing original research in field of threat assessment.
2002	Final Report of the Safe School Initiative	US Secret Service US Dept. of Education	Review of data learned through case review of school shootings and implications for the prevention of

			school targeted violence.
2002	Threat Assessment in Schools: Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates	US Secret Service US Dept. of Education	Recommendations for the implementation of processes to identify, assess, and manage students that may pose a threat of targeted school violence. Multidisciplinary assessments recommended.
2004	School-Based Risk Assessment (SBRA)	W. Halikias	Risk assessment process that includes referrals of all types of threats of severe violence, not only targeted violence. Unilateral assessment by professionals.

History of Canadian Threat Assessment Protocols

Following the Taber shooting, the Government of Alberta established the Taber Response Project with the purpose of taking a regional lead in understanding and recovering from the aftermath of the shooting. The Taber Response Project seconded Lorita Ichikawa from the Alberta Mental Health Board and Kevin Cameron, Team Leader of the Taber Response Team from Horizon School Division. The findings of the Taber Response Project were published in the Premier’s Task Force on Children At-Risk (Government of Alberta,

2000) and recommended that risk assessment protocols be developed by school districts to evaluate serious threats made by youth and that “professional gate-keepers have training in risk assessment based on updated (post school shooting) expertise” (2000).

The Alberta Government in response to the Premier’s Report of the Task Force (Government of Alberta, 2000) initiated the Building Community Capacity for Risk/Threat Assessment and Crisis Response Training Initiative (CRACR). This initiative involved the creation of a two day workshop with the goal of providing information related to improving crisis response teams and creation of threat assessment protocols in schools. The workshop was delivered by facilitators representing Alberta Mental Health, Alberta Education, and the office of the Solicitor General (Snatic, 2004). The workshops were delivered across Alberta to multidisciplinary audiences of school personnel, mental health, RCMP, child and family services workers, health professionals, school trustees and community members at large during the 2001-2002 school year. Workshops such as the CRACR (Snatic, 2004) and those offered through the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response led to the development and enhancement of threat assessment and crisis response protocols in many school divisions including the LRSD.

Cameron and Glenn Woods, Criminal Profiler for the RCMP with a grant secured from the Canadian Federal Justice Department prepared training programs focusing on threat assessment following the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Secret Service Models as well as an original Traumatic Events System Model (TES) (Cameron, 2000; Cameron, Sawyer, & Urbanoski, 2003; Sawyer & Cameron, 2001) for dealing with threats in schools and the traumatic response of systems affected by violence. Threat assessment training for educators, counsellors, school resource officers, and other school staff has occurred throughout Alberta

and other parts of Canada but, to date, no studies of the effectiveness and impact of the training has been completed. Current literature supports threat assessment models as the preferred model for addressing violence in schools (Cameron, Sawyer, & Urbanoski, 2003; Fein et al, 2002; Reddy et al., 2001; Vossekuil et al., 2002) but further research into the implementation of the model, effects of the model on reducing school violence, and accuracy of model in identifying students at risk of committing targeted school violence is necessary.

Systems dynamics. The TES (Cameron & Woods, 2005; applies a systems framework for understanding the contextual factors and dynamics of a particular school system that may influence the both the likelihood of an increase in threat making behaviours in a system or that might change the significance attributed to a specific threat. This model fits the criteria of third generation risk assessment tools that combine static and dynamic risk factor analysis within a family systems theoretical framework. The model was derived after the completion of grounded research following the Taber Response Project, by consultations between Cameron and the FBI, Secret Service and by interviewing personnel and crisis responders from other schools that had been victims of violent school targeted violence (Cameron & Sawyer, 2001). The model contributed to the literature by identifying patterns in school responses to traumatic events, by identifying how individual school traumatic events may elevate risk for threat making behaviours in other schools, and provides preventative data by identifying critical time periods that occur after a traumatic event that require more vigilant evaluation of threats and in some cases more resources made available to previously traumatized areas. The biggest contribution of the TES model and of Cameron's suggested process for threat assessment is the emphasis on understanding the contextual features of systems to place the threat assessment team in a more informed position leading to more

thorough assessment of data and more effective threat management based on the actual resources and capacity of the system at hand. Whether the model holds true, unfortunately will depend on further data derived from further school traumatic events.

Student typologies.

The TES model (Cameron & Woods, 2001; 2004; 2005) distinguishes between a traumatic event and a crisis event. A crisis is an event that is confined to the system in which it occurs (such as a school, or a family), it is a predicted event or reasonably expected event for the population (such as death of someone with cancer, a suicide of a high school student), and there exists a high capacity for predicting who will be impacted by the event. A traumatic event differs by being a highly unexpected event that impacts multiple systems, and it is more difficult to predict what and how many other systems that will be affected. For example, consider the difference in numbers of systems impacted by the Columbine tragedy, if no film footage had been available to the media (versus the three televised hours of the three hour and twenty minute event) (Cameron & Woods, 2005). Although forty school shootings had occurred in the United States prior to Columbine (National School Safety Center, 2004) this was possibly the first shooting that included Canada as part of the impact zone. The TES model defines impact zones as the systems surrounding ground zero (site and community of the actual traumatic event) that experience significant behavioural and emotional responses to the trauma. Within the impact zone there may also be secondary trauma sites, defined as sites that have already experienced a trauma response to a similar traumatic event so that the site is actually demonstrating behaviours and emotions similar to that found at ground zero.

Although the model focuses on trauma response which would seem to be occurring after the time in which a threat assessment would take place, it actually provides context that is extremely relevant to accurately assessing the risk of threat making behaviours in the impact zone. Cameron's research found that threat making behaviours actually increased at reasonably predictable times following a traumatic event within the impact area. The five critical time periods for increased threat making and violent behaviours included the two week time period from the date of the traumatic event, four to six weeks preceding Christmas, the anniversary date of the event, when something similar to the original event occurs somewhere else, and other time periods directly related to a schools trauma history. The National Association of School Psychologists (Poland, 2002) also identify spring semester as a critical time period in general due to the number of school shootings that have occurred across North America including Colorado, Arkansas, California, Alberta, Florida, Oregon, and now Minnesota.

Cameron and Woods (2001; 2004; 2005) through interviews with personnel from school's that had experienced school targeted violence identified that both school systems and school shooters possessed unique characteristics that influenced the response of the school to the tragic event but also the progression of the individual student to commit a violent act. The model defines four typologies of school systems that can be viewed on a continuum from tragically closed systems (most dysfunctional) to tragically open systems with open to closed systems falling in the middle. It is important that the threat assessment team and crisis responders understand how the school system is functioning in order to understand the school dynamics that may be impacting the data received during the threat assessment. The factors that influence where a school system fits on the continuum include:

Trauma history of the school and a general assessment of the schools pre-trauma functioning; leadership structure of the school; information sharing process between staff, students, and parents; relationship with crisis response team [and threat assessment team][sic]; requested focus of service delivery; beliefs and expectations about recovery; and affective range of the system. (Cameron & Woods, 2004, p. 32)

Similar to Halikias (2004), Cameron has attempted to categorize the students that commit violent school acts into specific typologies based primarily on motivation for behaviours. Cameron classifies students as traditional-behavioural (T-bt), traditional-cognitive (T-ct), mixed (MT), and non-traditional (NT). The primary difference to Cameron’s proposed model from that of Halikias is the lack of reference to how students that do not threaten targeted school violence might fit into the typologies (if at all). A weakness of Cameron and Woods (2001; 2004; 2005) model is the lack of supporting research identifying the rationale for the typologies chosen. The model also lacks any formalized process for applying the typologies to specific threat assessment situations. The application of the typology framework depends upon contextual information that may either be unavailable until after a student carries out a threat or dependent upon highly subjective data that would need to be corroborated from several sources before applying.

Table 3

TES School Shooter Typologies

Typology	Characteristics	Motivations/Contributing Factors
Traditional – behavioural	Demonstrate behaviours consistent with conduct disorder and are often known to school or	May have childhood trauma histories that they use to justify their feelings and behaviours.

	<p>police for aggressive behaviours.</p> <p>Utilize instrumental violence.</p> <p>Can delay violence depending on context.</p> <p>Usually target one person at a time unless they are part of a gang.</p> <p>Chose site of attack based on strategy and opportunity.</p>	<p>Try to avoid being caught.</p> <p>Blame others for their circumstance and society for failing them.</p>
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Traditional-cognitive	<p>Behaviours usually observable only to targets.</p> <p>Often meet conduct disorder criteria but often have not been identified by school or police due to skill and effort to avoid detection.</p> <p>Capable of “splitting” groups after detection due to high levels of manipulative skill and charm.</p> <p>Primarily use instrumental violence.</p> <p>Usually select one target at a time unless part of a gang.</p>	<p>Highly justify their behaviours.</p> <p>Do not want to be caught and can withhold acting violently to avoid consequences.</p> <p>Might have histories of neglect but in most cases do not.</p>
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	<p>Make take leader role in group</p> <p>and direct others to carry out the violent acts.</p> <p>Site chosen usually site of opportunity.</p>	
Mixed	<p>Act primarily out of affective domain.</p> <p>Highly emotional, prone to bursts of anger.</p> <p>Exhibit many characteristics of oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder.</p> <p>School and police often aware of youth due to past behaviour.</p> <p>Some may only express their aggression in home environment.</p> <p>Engage in affective violence and once activated quickly become “out of control” and unable to stop themselves during a violent episode.</p> <p>May chose one or multiple targets purposefully or emotionally based</p>	<p>Often have histories of neglect, abuse or exposure to violence.</p> <p>Have intense feelings of justification for violence at the time of the event but intense feelings of guilt and remorse after.</p> <p>Generally do not care if they are caught during the act.</p>

random targets e.g. “the whole school”.

Site selection may be based on emotional fusion to site if perceived as the place causing their pain.

Nontraditional	Act out in cognitive domain. Rarely have come to attention of school authorities or police. Engage exclusively in affective violence. Emotional pain builds over often resulting in an explosive violent act that may include homicide. May produce hit lists, violent web sites, or produce violent literature. Target selection may be specific or random. Site selection usually due to emotional fusion with site.	Often have trauma histories that were untreated. Abuse contributes to youths justification for violence. Work through justification process cognitively often through writings, drawings, stories, poems, and verbalizations.
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(Cameron & Woods, 2005, p. 79-86)

Both Halikias (2004) and Cameron (Cameron & Woods, 2005) suggest that the purpose of creating “typologies” to categorize different types of students that threaten violence, is not intended to profile students that may be at risk, but rather for the purposes of matching interview styles, interventions, treatments appropriate to individual typology. This requires a level of assessment expertise on the part of the clinician, relies on the subjective interpretation of events and behaviours, and is often determined on information that is not available until after a threat has been carried out (in the case of a nontraditional student). Neither author actually made a case for how the interventions would differ among the groups or offered concrete examples of how the information could be functionally used. Until further research is conducted, the typologies will remain within the realm of the “hypothetical” and although interesting, provide little direction for counsellors and clinicians.

Current literature supports threat assessment models as the preferred model for addressing targeted violence in schools (Cameron, Sawyer, & Urbanoski, 2003; Fein et al, 2002; Reddy et al., 2001; Vossekuil et al., 2002) but further research into the implementation of the model, effects of the model on reducing school violence, and accuracy of the model in identifying students at risk of committing targeted school violence is necessary.

Research on Use of Threat Assessment Models in Schools

Field Test Research

One demonstration project found to specifically address school-based threat assessment involved the field testing of threat assessment procedures in two Virginia school districts (Cornell et al., 2004). The results of the analysis of the use of threat assessment protocols to address 188 cases of school threats over a one year period led the researchers to suggest that threat assessment in schools is viable, applicable to all grade level, and results in

perceived beneficial outcomes to student threatening behaviours. The researchers identified three factors to be vital to effective implementation of threat assessment protocols. Firstly the threat assessment team must have a shared knowledge base of the nature and scope of school violence and a common understanding of what a threat is and how to assess for significance. Secondly, the use of multidisciplinary teams was encouraged to increase the expertise and resources available to the school and to increase the confidence of administrators to make informed decisions. Last, to effectively implement division wide threat assessment protocols the support of the superintendent and central office is required. Cornell and colleagues also identified the need for further research into the factors that influence whether threat are actually reported and how reported and unreported threats might differ in seriousness.

Single Case Research

A student from an urban west coast community was the first district student to be assessed using the FBI's four-pronged assessment model after uttering a threat to kill an official visiting the school (Sacco & Larsen, 2003). Although the district lacked specific threat assessment protocols the senior author of the article who attended the FBI's Leesburg's symposium, applied the four-prong assessment model to the incident. Several recommendations were made after a qualitative review of the event: specific protocols need to be established in schools clearly communicating threat assessment policies and procedures; students, staff and parents need to work collaboratively to address any needs to enhance school climate and impressions of school safety; parents need to be informed and involved in a timely manner when a threat assessment is conducted with their child; and efforts made to establish more collaborative relationships between multidisciplinary personnel involved with the student. The importance of interview skills, collaboration of

evidence, and multiple opinions concerning the classification of the threat using the FBI's continuum, and determination of what met the standard for a concerning personality trait was demonstrated in the application of the model to this specific incident. The author summarized the difficulty of making an accurate threat assessment in the statement "In trained hands the FBI model is a complex and psychologically sophisticated approach to understanding the psychology of the school-shooter. Using the 'profiling' in a vacuum is a dangerous oversimplification." (p. 174). The case study review highlighted several practical problems of implementing a new method of managing threats in schools but lacked the information necessary to clearly evaluate the effectiveness of the FBI threat assessment model as compared to the use of other risk management models.

School Violence Prevention Initiatives

Information and recommendations made in the research have guided school districts in Canada and the United States to initiate prevention policies and initiatives to prevent future incidents of school violence. Common initiatives include physical and visible school protection programs, legislation to increase consequences for violence, zero tolerance policies, preventative programming, and creation of school based threat assessment teams and protocols (Fein et al., 2002; McCann, 2002).

Visible School Protection Programs

Signs of violence prevention are now more visible, particularly in American urban schools. Metal detectors, security guards, school resource officers, and surveillance cameras have been installed in schools as symbols of the fight against violence in schools. The literature suggests that many difficulties arise from relying on these approaches to reduce targeted school violence. Cost of equipment, training of personnel, inefficient movement of

students, and most importantly no guarantee of success of thwarting determined attackers leaves budgets empty without significantly decreasing the risk of violence (McCann, 2002). Increased security measures create positive public press but, in some cases, also increase fear felt by the students inside the schools leading to increased weapon carrying by students (Kingery, Coggeshall, & Alford, 1998). The Task Force on School Violence (1999) made several recommendations to improve the safety of the schools in New York including increasing security officers but cautioned against the use of metal detectors. A review of research on the use of metal detectors in schools found that the problems of accuracy, over and under sensitivity, and difficulties of operating equipment efficiently often outweighed any practical benefits even though the process had a significant measure of public support.

The New York Task Force on School Violence (1999) also recommended legislation to toughen gun crime penalties, and proposed a bomb threat bill that would penalize youth for making false threats of violence with a mandatory license suspension for convicted juveniles. The report recommended legislation to require school districts to establish school safety teams, create emergency response plans, and institute character education programs in schools. The majority of the recommendations made in the report focused on creating procedures and policies designed to handle emergencies after the occurrence of violence as opposed to preventative measures to reduce the likelihood of violence. Other researchers and media argue that deterrent policies such as those suggested in the Task Force on School Violence do little to prevent targeted school violence (Fein et al., 2002; McCann, 2002; Rimer, 2002).

Zero Tolerance Policies

Zero tolerance policies regarding violence in schools have been enacted in some school divisions but recent research suggests that these policies can be overly punitive. A New York Times article stated that 33 kindergarten students were suspended from Philadelphia schools from September to December in 2002, an increase of 32 over the same period the previous year (Rimer, 2002). High school students have been suspended in American and Canadian schools for violent themes and messages expressed in works of literature and assignments (“Charges Dropped”, 2001). The consensus of the literature is that zero tolerance policies are not effective in proactively preventing school violence and do more harm than good (Fein et al., 2002; McCann, 2002; Mohandie, 2000; O’Toole, 2001; Williams & Heinrich, 2002). Cameron (Cameron and Woods, 2005) goes as far as to state that zero tolerance policies equal zero thought and the only zero tolerance that should be endorsed by schools is zero tolerance for NOT responding to threats.

Violence Prevention Programs

Furlong, Pavelski, and Saxton (2002) provide a comprehensive list of commonly used school violence prevention programs, identifying the targets of prevention program using the domains of “security, screening and assessment of aggressive behaviours, relationship building and bonding, individual student skill development, developing nonviolent campus norms, schooling process and structure, school discipline and positive support, and enhancing school climate” (p. 136). Programs are further analyzed based on the type of students the intervention is directly targeted for (marginalized students, low risk students, students with multiple risk factors for violence ect.) and then sorted according to the type of relationships fostered through the programming: reaffirming relationships, reconnecting relationships,

reconstructing relationships, repairing relationships, and protective relationships. Furlong and colleagues recommend that schools clearly identify what their unique violence prevention needs are before implementing any program. The recently completed CPHA Safe School Study (Canadian Public Health Association & National Crime Prevention Strategy, 2004) and the resulting resource *Assessment Toolkit for Bullying, Harassment and Peer Relations at School* (Canadian Public Health Association, 2004) provide current Canadian information on bullying, harassment, and peer relations as well as tools for schools to identify their own needs and suggested best practices.

Preventative programming intended to create more safe and caring schools and to increase awareness of the responsibilities of students, parents, and communities in raising healthy, well-adjusted children are common recommendations in reports on interventions for school violence. Anti-bullying programs (Fein et al., 2002, McCann, 2002), character education (Lion's Quest, 1997; Task Force on School Violence, 1999), and safe and caring school initiatives (Alberta Teacher's Association, 1999) are examples of preventative programs designed to prevent violence.

Bully prevention programs and safe school initiatives have been legislated in several states (Limber & Small, 2003) and provinces (Government of Alberta, 2000) but results regarding efficacy of programs at reducing violence and bullying are inconclusive. Cole (2003) reviewed studies that provided encouraging evidence that school-wide intervention programs lead to reduced levels of antisocial behaviour while other studies (Canadian Public Health Association & National Crime Prevention Strategy, 2004) indicated "no apparent positive effects on bullying and victimization rates" as reported by the students following participation in a school-based anti-bullying program (p.5). There are several complicating

factors when evaluating the effectiveness of bully prevention programs: definitions of bullying differ between programs, assessment methods vary (self-report, peer nomination, teacher nomination, and behavioural observations) (Espelage & Swearer, 2003), and uniform implementation of programs across schools is difficult to ensure.

Recommended research for reducing school-based violence and bullying reflects a similar trend to research in the area of school threat assessment. Espelage and Swearer (2003) review of current bullying and victimization research in American schools yielded insights similar to school shooting research by the Secret Service (Vossekuil et al., 2002), FBI (O'Toole, 2002), and Cameron and Woods (2001; 2004; 2005). Both streams of research identified the need to view acts of violence and aggression from a social-contextual (or ecological) perspective, both identified that individual characteristics, family context, school environment, social dynamics interact to influence motivations and behaviours of the aggressive student (Espelage & Swearer, O'Toole, 2000). Both areas of research also apply the ecological perspective to behaviours as such as homicide and suicide (Cameron & Woods, 2004; 2005), bully and victim (Espelage & Swearer) recognizing each pair as fluid entities. Research in the two fields also concur that interventions for bullying or threat management need to account for differences in individuals and motivations leading to the behaviours (Canadian Public Health Association, 2004), need to be comprehensive to address the needs of entire communities, and are strengthened by multidisciplinary community approaches (Cameron & Woods, 2004; 2005; Cole, 2003; Espelage & Swearer; Government of Alberta, 2000).

Threat Assessment as an Intervention

The creation of school based threat assessment teams and protocols have emerged as a dominant trend in the literature. Key recommendations of the Safe School Initiative reports (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002), the Premier's Task Force Report (Government of Alberta, 2000), The Dallas Independent School District's Response to Threats of Violence in Schools (Ryan-Arredondo et al., 2001), and reports from the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (O'Toole, 2000) support the development of threat assessment teams in schools. Effective school threat assessment involves the creation of cooperative teams that commonly include a core team of a school administrator, school district representative, and school counsellor; and if the core team assesses a threat to be of medium or high level, then an entire multidisciplinary team including a law enforcement officer, community mental health worker, and child welfare representative if appropriate are assembled (O'Toole, 2000; Sawyer & Cameron, 2001; Williams & Heinrich, 2002). Threat assessment models are being utilized in several southern Alberta school divisions but no studies have been published to date on efficacy of the models, perceived safety in schools, or on changes in rates of youth violence. Some of the benefits reported in the literature on the threat assessment team approach to violence include increased dialogue between youth service providers, increase in access to intervention of at-risk students, and avoidance of unfairly labelling non-violent students as potentially dangerous or lethal (McCann, 2002; Ryan-Arredondo; Williams & Heinrich).

Conclusion

Prevention of targeted school violence is a topic of great concern in North America despite its relatively low incidence rate. Rates of general violence and homicide for North American youth have decreased since the early 1990s but fear, in part due to media coverage, has remained high. Three case study reviews of school shootings and near school shootings form the basis for most known information on targeted school violence (O'Toole, 2000; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2002). The initial two reviews attempted to create risk factors and profiles of potential school shooters but small sample sizes negatively affected the reliability of data. Results from the Safe School Initiative reports (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002) discredited many of the common 'truths' held about perpetrators of school violence and, in fact, went so far as to say there is no definitive profile of a school shooter.

From these studies and other reports and statistics on violence in schools, the trend in the literature reflects a move away from first generation risk assessments that focus on static risk factors for the purpose of predicting violence and demonstrate entry into a third generation of risk assessment that combines static and dynamic factors with the goal of improving risk management through the use of more comprehensive threat assessment procedures and protocols. School threat assessment procedures have developed primarily out of the research of the United States Secret Service in the area of assassination prevention and target protection. Threat assessment training has occurred across many Alberta school districts and the philosophy of the threat assessment approach reflected in school district crisis management plans. American school districts are also incorporating threat assessment approaches but empirical research is not yet available to assess effectiveness (O'Toole, 2000;

McCann, 2002; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000). Many school violence prevention initiatives are mentioned in the literature including use of metal detectors, surveillance systems, zero tolerance policies, anti-bullying programs, and creation of threat assessment teams and protocols but, so far, the magnitude of the success of these programs has yet to be validated in the literature.

Targeted school violence has not been a common occurrence during the past 30 years and this low base rate has made it difficult to obtain valid and reliable data on the causes and possible preventative strategies to address targeted school violence. The literature clearly shows a move towards threat assessment procedures as the intervention of choice but additional research is needed to validate this intervention approach and to ascertain how to improve threat assessment models currently used in schools. Recommendations of the Taber Response Project, initiatives such as the Building Community Capacity for Risk/Threat Assessment and Crisis Response Workshops, research of the Secret Service, FBI, and Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Research recommend the implementation of threat assessment models. Several Alberta school divisions have implemented multidisciplinary teams as part of their threat assessment protocols but little attention has been paid to applying existing knowledge of how to create effective multidisciplinary teams to the field of school based threat assessment. There exist many possibilities for extensions of current research to evaluate and improve the efficacy of multidisciplinary threat assessment team approaches to managing school targeted violence.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Review of the Literature

The present literature review was completed using a systematic search strategy initially utilizing key psychological and educational data bases including: PsychINFO, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, Medline, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, E-stat, and CBCA. Key words included threat assessment teams, multidisciplinary threat assessment, school shootings, threat assessment, risk assessment, youth risk assessment, school violence prevention, bullying and school violence, Littleton, Taber, youth violence. Hand searching followed based on references obtained in relevant articles. Primary and secondary resources including journal articles, government reports, agency reports, books, and web site resource links were reviewed. Canadian threat assessment documents and articles were obtained primarily through hand searching and personal communication with experts in the field of Canadian threat assessment.

Threat Assessment Team Study

Threat assessment teams are a relatively new intervention in Canadian and American schools, with little research conducted on implementation barriers and recommendations for successful implementation. To gather further data and insight on the topic of multidisciplinary school threat assessment teams a small study of threat assessment team members was conducted over a two month period.

Guiding Research Question

The question guiding the research study was “How to implement an effective multidisciplinary school threat assessment team in a rural setting?”

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to:

1. Review the literature regarding the use of school based threat assessment teams as an intervention to prevent targeted school violence.
2. Create a training manual that could be utilized by rural school divisions to implement school threat assessment teams as part of a divisional threat assessment program.
3. To establish possible roles and responsibilities of team members reflecting the agency background of the member such as the RCMP, Child Welfare, Community Mental Health, and School Division personnel.
4. To identify the skills, knowledge, and concepts necessary to become an effective team member of a school threat assessment team.
5. To identify barriers to successful team participation and to compile resources for understanding the models of threat assessment used in schools.

Ethics Approval

An application for ethical review was made to the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board during the planning stages of the study, providing a project overview, recruitment plan, and procedures for acquiring informed consent, and data storage procedures. Interim ethical approval to proceed was granted November 17th, 2004 (see Appendix A).

Participants

Participants were selected from threat assessment team members from across the Livingstone Range School Division. At least two participants were chosen from each

discipline represented on LRSD threat assessment teams including mental health workers, school counsellors, school administrators, RCMP, and Child and family service workers. Since the LRSD is served by five different RCMP detachments, and receives services from two different children service authorities, and two health regions, care was taken to recruit possible participants from a range of service areas. Participation in the study was voluntary and agency approval was obtained prior to approaching potential participants. Potential participants were required to have completed at least one threat assessment and/or have participated in Level 2 Threat Assessment Training.

Interviews

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix B) and were interviewed for between forty-five minutes to an hour using a structured interview guide (Appendix C). The interview guide consisted of eleven open-ended questions intended to provide the researcher with data and insights relative to the participant's experiences as a member of the threat assessment team and also reflecting information specific to the agency they represented. Individual data was compiled according to question and to agency. Participants were encouraged to expand on responses to questions and to contribute any additional information or insights relative to the use of the threat assessment approaches used in the LRSD. Interview data was compiled and analyzed to identify trends in information and to identify information applicable to the creation of the threat assessment training manual.

Procedures

Due to my current and past employment history, over seventy-five percent of the possible participants were known by the researcher. Participants were recruited by means of a telephone call providing information about the survey and followed up with an e-mailed

recruitment letter summarizing the project goals and expected time commitment (See Appendix D). All participants contacted agreed to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted at the participant's place of work with one exception where the participant was interviewed at the researcher's place of employment. All participants signed letters of informed consent, completed the demographic survey and participated in a structured interview. Information from each interview was coded as an individual document identifying only employment agency and recorded also on a master template. All responses to each question of the survey were analyzed for trends and data that would have implication for the proposed threat assessment team training manual.

Manual development

The purpose of creating a threat assessment training manual was to provide a consolidated resource for school divisions to use when implementing a rural threat assessment team model. Content guidelines for the training manual were established by reviewing the trends from the interviews and through the review of key documents and information related to school threat assessment. From the interviews it was determined that the manual needed to contain historical information explaining the development of school threat assessment protocols, a common language for defining the work of the threat assessment team, recommendations for the creating more effective teams, and access to resources and tools that could be used by a school division implementing the use of school threat assessment teams.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Multidisciplinary Teams

The use of multidisciplinary teams has emerged as a growing trend in public sector human driven systems such as healthcare (Gelles, Sasaki-Swindle, & Palarea, 2002; Sengupta, Dobbins, & Roberts, 2003; Sloper, 2004), mental health (Power, 2003), children services (Nicholson, Artz, Armitage, & Fagan, 2000) and in education (Fein et al., 2002; Luna, & Johnson, 2004; Williams & Heinrich, 2002). Research completed to date lacks empirical data to prove a direct relationship between the efficacy of multidisciplinary team and effectiveness (Atkinson, Wilkin, Stott, & Kinder, 2001 as cited in Sloper, 2004). However, the threat assessment team (TAT) professionals that were interviewed identified several positive results of multidisciplinary threat assessments including: earlier identification of at-risk youth, earlier access to interventions, access to previously unattainable services, increased family support services, and improved academic performance for students that received intervention.

The subjective data provided by the team members in the study conducted by Atkinson and colleagues (2001) supported the responses provided by the LRSD threat assessment team members interviewed. Team members from all disciplines listed the benefits of conducting threat assessments in a multi-disciplined format as an effective method to achieve earlier identification of students at-risk, but not just at risk for violence. Interviewees also outlined how the process resulted in the identification of students with academic difficulties, peer relation-conflict resolution skill deficits, family dysfunction, mental health issues, as well as risk for violence against self or others. The threat making behaviour that

brought the student to the attention of the TAT resulted in earlier identification of a variety of issues. Those interviewed believed that the variety of agencies represented on the team contributed to students and families receiving more accurate information about intervention services available through a variety of agencies including mental health, schools, child and family services, and community family support agencies. In some cases, interviewees identified specific situations where students or families had previously attempted to receive intervention assistance support from community agencies but due to lack of knowledge or gate-keeping policies had been unable to receive services. The recommendations for treatment and intervention made by the TAT, and the influence of individual team members with their own agencies facilitated access to services. Some team members indicated that the longer term effect of the TAT recommendations and management plans had resulted in improved school performance as measured by academic success and attendance, but other members expressed dissatisfaction over the lack of information about how students fared after the implementation of threat assessment management plans so were unable to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention plan.

Development of Effective Multidisciplinary Teams

In Sloper's (2004) review of current research of multidisciplinary teams for children services (in the United Kingdom) several organizational factors emerged as key components in the process of planning a multidisciplinary service including the need for:

- Clear and realistic aims and objectives that are understood and accepted by all agencies.
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities with clear lines of responsibility and accountability.

- Commitment of both senior and frontline staff, aided by involvement of frontline staff in policy development.
- Strong leadership and a multi-agency steering or management group.
- Collaborative timetable for implementation of changes and incremental approach to change.
- Projects linked to other planning and decision-making processes.
- Good systems of communication at all levels, with information sharing and adequate information technology systems. (Sloper, p. 575-576).

Nicholson and colleagues (2000) review of multidisciplinary teams providing services to children, youth, and families used similar criteria to Sloper to evaluate team effectiveness including disciplinary roles, communication systems, leadership, coordination, composition of team and organizational and personal “inhibiting and facilitating factors” (Nicholson et al., 2000, p.52).

Organizational considerations. Interviews with TAT members in the Livingstone Range School Division supported the relevance of the key factors reported by Sloper (2004). Most team members reported similar understanding of the goals and aims of the TAT although some confusion existed over the difference between the terms ‘threat assessment’ and ‘risk assessment’. Team members described the mission of the TAT in similar ways including: to determine if a child is a danger to self and others and to determine what actions can be taken to prevent further threatening actions; a group session to determine if a child is a danger to self and others and to determine what actions can be taken to prevent further threatening actions; to facilitate the creation of school that is safe for students and staff; to provide a process for addressing high risk behaviours; to find students that are contributing to

a negative and scary climate in our school and find ways to deal with or diffuse their presenting behaviours; to determine level of threat so to afford help to the student and to prevent an actual event from occurring; to determine if a child is going to be a danger to self and others and to create a plan of support for student; to ensure a safe learning environment for students and community and that includes meeting the needs of the child at risk. The three common elements of the mission statement of the TAT included:

- assessment of risk of harm to the threat maker or others
- development of an intervention plan to meet needs of threat maker and victim(s)
- creation of a management plan to monitor and review progress of the student, to address outstanding issues related to continued school safety.

The use of the TAT as a disciplinary measure or body did not emerge in TAT members mission statements, suggesting the TAT views itself as an assessment and intervention body versus a punitive measure.

Roles of team members. Threat assessment team members stated the need for clearly defined roles, and responsibilities, within an accountability framework. Team members were able to articulate a clear role for themselves however; some team members did not think that other team members had a clear understanding of their agencies role. This was particularly true in the case of mental health therapists. The range of functions that therapists reported performing or being asked to perform included:

- providing mental health status exams,
- suicide/homicide risk assessments,
- diagnosis of mental illness,

- walking school through their own threat assessment policies
- determination of need for mental health referrals,
- sharing knowledge of child/adolescent development and violence risk factors,
- advocating for the child,
- recommending interventions for school and family,
- evaluation significance of behaviours in the larger spectrum of behaviours and
- interviewing the threat maker.

The request for therapists to interview the student led to ethical concerns on the part of some therapists related to how information would be used, parental consent, and ethical access to needed information. The expected function of therapists differed among therapists and also different expectations of the school, expertise of team members, and sometimes due to agency expectations. The range in role expectations created confusion and frustration with the threat assessment process for some individuals, although each member viewed the TAT process as an improvement over unilateral assessments of risk.

Child and family service workers expressed uniform descriptions of role including consultation, information source, and knowledge of family systems and risk factors: Role is to bring some key questions to look at from my discipline. What role do the parents play in situation? After gathering information then we can support, empower, and encourage parent to be involved in addressing the problem or issue with the child. We can help motivate parents, help parent facilitate issues that may be affecting the family. Almost all threat assessment situations we have participated in have involved problems at home. We don't want our role to be taking over for the parents. It doesn't work if everyone comes to the table saying this isn't my mandate but rather this is

what I can bring to the table. We all can hide behind mandates so it is the attitude we bring to the table that matters.

(Child and family service workers)

Similar to mental health workers, child and family service workers believed that the expectation of what they could do within their role differed depending on the attitudes, experience, and knowledge of the individuals participating on the team. Child and family service workers also stated that continued changes in both government legislation and government ministry restructuring, and changes in service mandates has led to misunderstanding of what role child and family service workers can play in the threat assessment process and in what is available as possible interventions for students.

Participation on the team provided an added benefit of the opportunity to inform partners of new programs and mandates important to services for children.

RCMP members identified their role as falling within two realms of police function: law enforcement and community prevention. As a law enforcement officer information is provided regarding how the threat does or does not fit the definition of “threat” in the criminal code and provide investigational suggestions to gather intelligence information. During the TAT meeting information relevant to the proceedings may be shared according to information protocols.

The role of school personnel differed based on several factors including relationship between counsellor and administration, understanding of threat assessment by administration, skill level of counselling staff, and administrative styles. Due to the small number of administrators and counsellors interviewed, it was impossible to generalize the information across the disciplines. According to the LRSD threat assessment protocol administration and

counselling staff bear the joint responsibility for determining immediate action after a threat has been made and gathering information to ascertain whether the full threat assessment team will be called in. In practice, this policy is not uniformly followed. In some cases the school administration makes the initial decision regarding the threat in isolation, in some schools the decision is made collaboratively with the school-based counsellor. Some school staff consult with mental health workers and RCMP to determine whether the threat will be classified worrisome behaviour (and dealt with at a school level) or as a threat resulting in the assembly of the TAT.

Commitment to policy. The third organizational factor identified by Sloper (2004) is the commitment of both front line and management staff to policies and procedures as well as the involvement of frontline staff in the development of policy. The underlying importance of this factor was evident in the responses provided by TAT members. Both management and front line staff were included in the sample of team members interviewed. The management members from mental health and children services had also been part of the consultative process that led to the development of the LRSD Safety Handbook (Lorenz, 2001; LRSD, 2004) and policies (including overall crisis response and threat assessment protocols). The majority of the team members interviewed, irrespective of discipline, expressed the importance of consultation with all agency members in the development of threat assessment policy. Team members felt that early involvement would facilitate team building, improve understanding of process, prevent the inclusion of protocols that might be impossible for outside agencies to accommodate, and would also ensure that management at all levels was aware of and supportive of policies created. Collaboration early in the process provides more opportunity for agencies to allocate time and resources to initiatives.

Strong leadership. The creation of multi-agency steering groups, management groups, and strong leadership are a fourth organizational factor important for the creation of effective multidisciplinary teams. This factor emerged in the interviews as a significant weak link in many of the threat assessment teams. There was a range in who assumed leadership positions for the team including the school-based counsellor, teachers, administrators, central office personnel, and occasionally the mental health therapist. The concern expressed by several members was the lack of clarity of who was the leader, what did the designation imply regarding role and function, and who was responsible for overseeing that the threat management recommendations were carried out. A variety of possibilities for who should assume the role were provided including the principal, the school-based counsellor, and the division office threat assessment team leader (assistant-superintendent) as the most common suggestions. The majority of respondents indicated that who held the position of leader was less of an issue than that of clearly communicating the function and responsibilities of the leader. A few of the TAT members interviewed also participate on threat assessment teams within an adjacent school division, where a central threat assessment team leader has been appointed to co-ordinate responses for threat assessments at a district level and even in that context confusion still arises at individual TAT meetings as to who is directing the process.

Collaboration for change. Another factor designed suggested to improve efficacy of multidisciplinary teams involves specific collaboration by inter-agency policy makers to develop realistic and incremental plans to introduce new policy. In the case of the LRSD, the creation of threat assessment protocols was part of an overall school safety planning initiative that included variety of community stakeholders including Alberta Mental Health Board (now included within corresponding health regions), Alberta Health, Alberta Child and

Family Services, and the RCMP. Additional information was provided by the Taber Response Team, Horizon School Division, Grasslands School Division, Medicine Hat School Division, St. Albert School Division, Edmonton Catholic School Division, and the FBI (Lorenz, 2001). The timeline for implementation was largely influenced by access to training and in-service in crisis response and threat assessment.

Project links. Another common element in the creation of effective multidisciplinary teams is the relationship between the proposed project and other related projects or initiatives. This factor is particularly relevant in rural areas where social service multidisciplinary initiatives tend to result in the same agency personnel networking on a multitude of projects. In the case of threat assessment teams in the LRSD, many of the team members were familiar with each other and shared bonds related to other multidisciplinary teams such as school-based crisis response teams, community crisis response teams, victim services programs, collaborative mental health projects, and community health initiatives. The crossover between members on different teams and the related focus (providing services for children and families) provided the secondary benefit of increased liaison of agencies, improved relationships between individuals, and more frequent contact providing opportunity for general discussion of community service delivery and community needs.

Effective communication. Good systems of communication at all levels, with organized information sharing and adequate information technology systems is the last key factor that Sloper (2004) identified as important to the process of development of effective multidisciplinary teams. The communication factor identified most frequently by members of the LRSD threat assessment team as important was the clear identification of a key contact member for the team. It was not always clear to team members who was responsible

for the dissemination of information and for providing follow-up information to team members.

Implementation and Management Considerations

After going through the collaborative process of creating clear goals, roles, and decision-making processes, the multidisciplinary team must be able to operationalize the process. Sloper's (2004) review of the literature revealed six key factors that facilitated a smooth transition to change and to positive on-going management of the process: adequate time and resources, recruitment of team members with "right" background, joint training opportunities, effective support and supervision, evaluation of outcomes and regular policy review.

Adequate time and resources. The need to conduct a threat assessment often arises in a school setting with little warning. Severity and context of the threat determines the timeframe necessary for pulling together the threat assessment team. The capacity of the individual agencies to respond to the request to participate on a threat assessment team depends largely on the human resources available. According to the team members interviewed, so far, agencies have been able to respond to school requests for assistance within zero to three days of the request. Although a full team meeting is not always possible on the day of the threat, team members communicate and consult by phone until such time as a full team meeting can be arranged. School personnel report satisfaction with response times from outside agencies but all agencies and school personnel expressed concern that limited staff availability could become more of a barrier should the number of threat assessments increase. Administrative team members from children services, mental health, and RCMP expressed commitment to responding to school requests. One person interviewed expressed

concern over appropriateness of referrals to the threat assessment team but identified this problem as being school specific.

Recruitment of team members. Careful consideration of the experience, training, and personal qualities of individual team members need to be considered in the recruitment process. Team members were asked to identify the necessary qualities of an effective threat assessment team member and several common themes emerged. Most team members agreed that from an agency level the team member required a good understanding of their own agencies resources, protocols, and information-sharing guidelines. In addition, the majority of team members agreed that common training in school-based threat assessment was an asset so everyone at the table shared a common understanding of the process. At a minimum, all team members need to be familiar with the school division policies directly related to threat assessment. The personal qualities that were most commonly mentioned across disciplines of team members included open-mindedness, team-work skills, above average communications skills, respect and understanding of the disciplines at the table, analytical skills, flexible, creative, and ability to view the “big picture” in relation to the stated problem and possible solutions.

Joint training and team building. The literature suggests that joint training opportunities provide opportunity for the development of team cohesion, increased commitment to common goals, and increased team cohesion (Kerr, 2003). Interview responses by team members supported this finding. Team members that had participated in Level One and Level Two Threat Assessment Training courses reported better understanding of LRSD threat assessment policy, the role of threat assessment versus risk assessment, and the benefits of collaborative, multidisciplinary decision making.

Effective support and supervision. Support for the establishment of multidisciplinary threat assessment teams and supervision of the implementation and efficacy of individual threat assessments. Alberta Education has directed school boards to develop local safety planning policies including crisis response protocols. Team members questioned, however, the support for the ongoing costs associated with threat assessment teams. Training of new staff, and establishment of dedicated time to ensure that policies and protocols reflect current research requires time and monetary support for both human resources and program resources. Snatic's (2004) evaluation of Building Community Capacity for Risk/Threat Assessment and Crisis Response (CRACR) Workshops conducted in Alberta schools in the 2001-2002 school year paralleled the response of team members expressing a need for ongoing funding and resources to develop and build on current threat assessment and crisis response policies.

Evaluation of outcomes. Research supports the importance of incorporating evaluation procedures during onset of creating a multidisciplinary team (Sloper, 2004). Outcome evaluation of team effectiveness provides data to ensure continued funding by agencies and to avoid the trend reported by Modzeleski (1996) of decreased funding for violence prevention initiatives in schools. Recommendations made in response to the evaluations of the CRACR workshops included the implementation of an evaluative component to risk/threat assessment protocols (Snatic, 2004). The issue of accountability as an adjunct to roles and responsibilities arose as an important issue for some members of the TAT. Several members wished that there was a process in place to debrief individual threat assessments and to learn the longer term results and effectiveness of the threat management plan. One team member commented that "in terms of reviews of process it is mostly left to

administration. It might be nice to review the threat assessment process similar to how we review crisis response even if only once per year”.

Regular review of policies and procedures. With any new initiative or program, policy and procedure review and subsequent modification is likely. Change driven by evaluation and functional program considerations are likely to result in policy and procedures that actually reflect common practice. Continued policy review of new initiatives such as threat assessment protocols are necessary to respond to unexpected implementation barriers. The LRSD Safety Manual was created in 2001 and division policy directs a review to occur yearly with input from both school division personnel and partner agencies. Team members that also participated on threat assessment teams in the Foothills School Division commented that policy review in that division occurs once a year to review all crisis response plans and all agencies are invited to participate in the process.

Common Barriers to Effective Teams

Pulling together individuals from different disciplines to work toward a common goal is not an easy task, particularly if the goal involves change at a multi-system level. Regardless of the focus of the multidisciplinary team (health, educational) certain barriers emerged as common factors that have the capacity to reduce or even destroy the effectiveness of a team. Obviously, the opposing factors to the aforementioned facilitating factors and the following additional contextual factors of: constant reorganization, frequent staff turnover, lack of qualified staff, financial uncertainty, differing ideologies/agency cultures, and in some cases lack of co-terminous boundaries of agencies (Sloper, 2004). Each of these potential barriers emerged as relevant to LRSD threat assessment team members interviewed.

Constant reorganization. Team members did not report concern over the actual reorganization of the threat assessment team other than a few outside agency team members that commented that role expectation and leadership sometimes varied between different schools. Select children service, mental health, and RCMP team members identified reorganization within their own agency as having an impact on the time and priority that is placed on continued participation on the school threat assessment team as well as the resources that they are able to offer as possible intervention supports.

Frequent staff turnover. Staff turnover emerged as a barrier to establishing a core base of potential team members with a similar training background in threat assessment. Staff turnover in outside agency staff resulted in gaps in knowledge of school division threat assessment policy as well as a lack of transfer of knowledge of agency involvement in the original threat assessment protocols. Members that were involved in the original development of threat assessment and crisis response teams expressed more commitment to the process of multidisciplinary threat assessment regardless of whether they were front line staff of management.

Lack of qualified staff. Relevance of qualified staff emerged in two general areas: conceptual awareness of threat assessment as a process and specific skill sets related to strategic interviewing of youth. Some respondents from both outside agencies and school based staff expressed concern over the qualifications of the school-based team to evaluate and adequately investigate threats. In some cases the school administrator would unilaterally decide whether to call in the team without consulting counselling staff, some administration had not attended the threat assessment training, and in some cases counselling personnel

were expected to interview students to gather data for threat assessment review without specialized training or experience.

Financial uncertainty. Both school and agency team members expressed frustration with initiatives established in response to government task forces but then are left to the individual “systems” to fund. Although committed to the concept of threat assessment team members expressed concern over how continued cutbacks might impact their ability to be available to participate on threat assessment teams in the future. Commitment to collaborative training, policy review meetings, and debriefing sessions require significant time commitments that require financial commitment.

Different ideologies and agency cultures. Children Services, Education, RCMP, and Mental Health have all moved in the direction of more collaborative, community based consultation in the development and delivery of services evidenced in joint initiatives such as the student health initiative, school resource officers, family school liaison counsellors, and community policing projects. Some organizations and systems have embraced the collaborative approach more quickly than others and dependent upon both leadership and planning. The largest discrepancy in ideology that emerged in the interviews was between mental health procedures and philosophies regarding risk assessment and that held by school system personnel. Half of the mental health therapists interviewed viewed their role in threat assessment as providing an expert opinion regarding the risk for violence of the student in question. The preference of half of the therapists was to conduct the assessment in isolation and to present the information to the group. This preference may be rooted in tradition as previous to the development of threat assessment team’s mental health personnel were often asked to conduct risk assessments as a requirement before students would be allowed back

into school after exhibiting threatening or violent behaviour. Mental health professionals also work closely with other health care providers where unilateral assessments are more common. This particular barrier has the potential to derail the entire threat assessment process if not addressed early in the planning process.

Lack of co-terminous boundaries. Lack of coterminous boundaries of agencies emerged as a barrier in some but not all of the studies examined by Sloper (2004). Discussion of co-terminous boundaries did emerge in interviews as a relevant barrier to effective communication. Two different health regions (which include community mental health), two different children services regions, and five different RCMP regions exist in the LRSB. Different eligibility criteria and policies affecting service delivery are present, particularly in regards to mental health services. In some cases, schools have students that fall within two health regions, two children service regions, and three RCMP districts requiring schools to have knowledge of multiple systems of service delivery. In interviews, the lack of uniform services and policies were cited as barriers to effective communication, resulting in a need for multi-leveled information policies, contact lists, and training sessions. School administrators in particular, expressed frustration with the extra time commitment to keeping informed of policies that vary between service agencies. At a district level, the lack of co-terminous boundaries was reported to increase the number of meetings and time spent with bureaucratic tasks related to maintaining open and effective communication. Team members from non-school agencies also identified the challenge of providing services to multiple school divisions with different protocols for threat assessment and different expectations for service.

Most Effective Intervention to Increase Efficacy of Multidisciplinary Teams

The most effective intervention that emerged in Sloper's (2004) comprehensive review of multi-agency working, regardless of the barrier encountered, was the implementation of joint training for all agency members. However, Sengupta and colleagues (2003) state that joint training should not be considered a "magic bullet" but rather all team members and agencies must also be able to see how the team is part of a whole system's approach to address a need across a spectrum of sectors.

The Shift from Violence Prediction to Threat Assessment

Risk assessment accuracy has improved over the years moving from an estimated accuracy rate of one in three at the time of Monahan's review of first generation (sometimes referred to as clinical assessments) of risk of violence (Monahan, 1981; Naude, 2003), to one in two by the second (actuarial approaches reviewing mostly static factors) and third generation of risk assessment (actuarial approaches incorporating dynamic and contextual factors) (Fuller & Cowan, 1999). Actuarial tools surprised many by being as accurate and sometimes more accurate in predicting adult recidivism than structured interviews conducted by skilled, experienced clinicians (Andrews & Bonta, 1998). It is important to remember that anticipating the statistical likelihood of a specific behaviour such as extreme targeted school violence occurring at some unknown point in time in the future is actually a pretty easy task. Without conducting an interview, reviewing a file, or making use of any of any risk assessment tool, most people with an understanding of the base rate of youth violence could fairly reliably predict that it is unlikely that any youth (particularly if female) will commit an act of lethal school violence. In 1996/97 the likelihood of a young male in Canada committing murder was 0.0038% (or one in approximately 26 000) (Sinclair & Boe, 1998).

Therefore, if a clinician wanted to maintain some really impressive accuracy ratings it would be prudent to assume that all school male youths are not going to commit homicide.

Improving Prediction Accuracy in Risk Assessment

Continued research in the field of risk assessment has led to the identification of common factors that improve the accuracy of the predictions made in risk assessments. The factors of goal setting, timeframes for assessment, communication of assessment results, interviewer bias, interviewer competence, structure of assessment process, data access, and data veracity all impact the ultimate merit of the final risk assessment (Naude, 2003; Webster & Jackson, 1997). Interview participants across the disciplines and agencies represented in the study independently discussed each of the factors within the context of the threat assessment process. A brief review of how each factor was considered relevant by threat assessment team members is discussed below.

Goal Agreement and Use of Data

It was evident in the interviews that some threat assessment team members shared a common understanding of how threat assessment differs from risk assessment but for some members the distinction was not as clear. Most confusion arose when a team member misunderstood the purpose of the threat assessment to be a simple determination of general risk for violence. Although a general risk assessment may be included as part of a threat management plan, it is not the ultimate function of the threat assessment team to complete a general violence risk assessment. Team members that sensed a lack of shared goals for the threat assessment reported feelings of frustration and more ambivalence about participation on the team. Lack of clarification over who would have final access to information gathered

during the threat assessment also influenced the openness of a few team members from non-school agencies.

Timeframes and Access to Resources

The response time required of threat assessment team members varied greatly dependent upon the perceived severity of the threat. The most serious threat making behaviours were reported at Division Three (Grades 7-9) and Division Four levels (Grades 10-12). In the case of immediate threats, police were most often involved and if charges were laid, the role of the threat assessment team became that of threat management. In these cases, the school would often try to establish a threat assessment team meeting as soon as possible so they could make discipline decisions and safety or re-entry plans for the student. School principals stated that since suspending a student can increase a student's risk for following through with threats of harm directed at the school, and due to board policies regarding suspension and expulsion, quick response time for the establishment of a threat assessment team meeting is often a priority.

The ability of outside agencies to respond to these requests is limited by access to personnel and to perceived priority of the situation described by the school. Mental health workers described the greatest difficulty in responding to requests to attend threat assessments. Although willing to participate, most therapists have a full client load, full appointment schedules, and some travel to different clinics so are not always in the community requiring assistance. Mental health workers expressed willingness to participate but emphasized the importance of schools accurately gathering as much data as possible to ensure that a full team meeting was required. School principals and counsellors reported satisfaction in the response time of mental health workers in most cases. Both counsellors

and principals identified mental health workers as key members of the threat assessment team but expressed concern about whether they would be able to continue to provide service if the number of threat assessments should increase in the future. Child and family service managers and a RCMP sergeant stated that they think participation in common threat assessment training would be beneficial but due to limited budgets and reduced personnel it is not always possible to free staff to attend.

Communicate Limits of Competence

Some team members had taken Level One Threat Assessment Training, some had taken Level Two Threat Assessment Training (Strategic Interviewing), and some lacked specialized threat assessment training but did have risk assessment skills as utilized in mental health and law enforcement disciplines. Two team members expressed that it would be helpful to know the specific backgrounds and qualifications of team members.

Interviewer Bias

At least one member interviewed from each outside agency expressed the importance of having a balance of team members from those that know the student to those that do not to help eliminate potential bias in both the presentation and interpretation of data. One team member expressed that in some instances, the family background seemed to influence the response of school personnel to a specific threat and if the family was perceived as a “good” family under-reaction was more common. Team members also expressed the importance of streamlining information so that information shared is relevant to the threat assessment but also based on facts and not rumor.

Systematic Approach to Implementation

Several team members that were very informed about the LRSD threat assessment protocol (some members were involved in policy creation), expressed that at times the protocol is either not followed, or not understood by the administration of the school. In some cases, outside agency personnel believed their primary role was to walk the school through their own policy. Responses of both school team members and outside agency members indicate confusion over the steps to be taken during a threat assessment.

Identify and Secure Data

Gathering data to assess the risk of a student carrying through on a threat involves the retrieval of relevant historical data, and an assessment of individual, social, school and family dynamics (the four prongs of threat assessment) (O'Toole, 2000). Access to this data may require interviews with the student, the students and family and other students. Interviews suggest that the school takes primary responsibility for gathering this data except in the case of a police investigation.

Data Accuracy

The topic of data accuracy did not arise as a specific topic in any of the interviews other than in a general way when RCMP expressed that they would rather be provided with information related to an ongoing threat assessment at the beginning of the process versus part way through and by a mental health therapist that discussed the issue of bias when some individuals report information regarding a student.

Summary

Multidisciplinary threat assessment teams are a relatively new initiative in the LRSD. Over the past four years most schools have enacted the threat assessment protocols but the

number of full team threat assessments per school has averaged from zero to five a year. Since few full threat assessment team assessments occur, non-school personnel in some cases had more experience with the process than the school based personnel. This reality again supports the contention in the research that common training experiences are essential to building both expertise and a sense of team between members (Sloper, 2004).

The LRSD began implementation of the threat assessment protocol by having administrators and counsellors participate in the Building Community Capacity for Risk/Threat Assessment and Crisis Response Training Initiative and taking Level One Threat Assessment Training (Cameron & Sawyer, 2001). Agency partners participated in the CCRCR workshop and some in the Level One Threat Assessment Training. One of the themes that emerged during the interviews was the importance of having the school administration committed to a multidisciplinary approach to assessing threats. Recognizing that some administrators were used to a more unilateral approach to “dealing” with threats, divisional office purposely trained only the counsellors in Level Two Threat Assessment (strategic interviewing) with the intent of creating expertise outside of administration compelling collaboration during the threat assessment process.

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Conclusions

Implications

Although team members were unanimous that the use of threat assessment teams represent an improvement in schools responses to threat making behaviour, feedback also suggests that there are several factors that have the potential to undermine the effectiveness of the multidisciplinary team approach. To ensure the best use of human resources it is vital that teams share a common understanding of the goal of threat assessment and how it differs from general violence risk prediction. An essential part of understanding the goal of the goal of the threat assessment team is for each member to have a clear understanding of both the role and expectation of their agency as a team member as well as an understanding and respect for what each of the other agencies bring to the process. In rural areas many agency personnel including child and family services workers, mental health therapists, and RCMP work in environments where they are required to be generalists in order to respond to the varied demands of their occupations and limited staff resources. It is often not possible for the agencies to commit to always sending the same agency personnel to respond to requests for participation on the threat assessment team. It is therefore imperative that when new members participate on a threat assessment for the first time or after a lengthy absence that the team leader take the time to orientate and update the member.

It would also be prudent to take steps to formalize a process for communicating the confidentiality and informed consent processes that are followed by the team and agencies when conducting multidisciplinary assessments. All of the team members interviewed reported that the members of the TAT's each belonged to professional associations and

agencies that provide specific ethical guidelines and are subject to government legislation that provides guidelines the sharing of information. The cross-ministry Information Sharing Committee that was created through the Alberta Child and Youth Initiative (ACYI, 2003) provides information about interpreting the new Health Information Act and in relation to information sharing. Some divisions and other government agencies that collaborate on multidisciplinary teams have elected to form formal partnerships to create “common programs” or “integrated services” (ACYI, 2003, p.2) to formalize the collaborative programming that is occurring, allowing for more transparent information sharing policies. The partnership provides a tangible connection between the agency partners and is transparent of the public. It is then incumbent on the school division and individual schools to openly acknowledge the partnership and the impact the partnership can have on the sharing of information and in what contexts. However, for most team members, the issue of team trust and collaboration was also an important contributor to the decision to share information. Even when team members had the authority to share information the issue of trust in the individual’s involved in the assessment and trust in the process emerged as a significant deciding factor in what information was shared. Trust tends to be earned over time and as relationships build between agencies and individuals. Shared training, collaboration on other projects and initiatives, and planned operational reviews of the threat assessment process are suggestions for providing opportunity for increased contact between team members.

Strengths and Limitations

Interview Findings

There were several strengths and limitations to the interviews conducted with TAT members from the LRSD. Strengths included the range and depth of professionals interviewed including principals, school-based counsellors, mental health therapists, RCMP officers, child and family services workers, and a representative from the school division central office staff. The team members interviewed participated on one or more threat assessments in one or more schools across the school division providing input relevant to more than ten schools located throughout the LRSD. Interview candidates were selected to strategically represent a range of schools and communities to generate as much information as possible and to avoid singling out any one school threat assessment team.

Limitations of the interviews conducted included the small number of team members interviewed from any one agency. The minimum number of people interviewed from an agency was two (with the exception of central office personnel where only one member met the criteria to be an interview candidate) with the most being four. The small number of interviews made it statistically inappropriate to suggest that the findings are representative of all of the members of an agency and may not be transferable to other threat assessment teams in other rural areas. Small numbers of threat assessments conducted by individual members and individual teams combined with the new implementation of threat assessment protocols in the LRSD limited the ability of the data to be generalized to other school threat assessment team experiences. Three of the team members that had participated in over three threat assessments commented that each time they attended a threat assessment the process seemed to flow more smoothly and to result in better intervention and threat management plans.

Since the majority of interviewees had participated in two or less actual threat assessments, it is possible that their recommendations might have been qualitatively different had they been interviewed after more exposure to the threat assessment process.

TAT Training Manual

One of the primary goals behind the creation of a TAT Manual for rural school divisions was to provide one source that would be able to give a contextual history of the use of threat assessment models in Alberta schools recognizing the contribution that has been made to the understanding of threat assessment and crisis response in schools generated by the work of many dedicated professionals across southern Alberta representing agencies that included Alberta Mental Health, Alberta Learning, and the Solicitor General. Although the main parts of the threat assessment model arise out of the work of the FBI and US Secret Service it was the dedication and commitment of local Albertans through government initiatives that enabled school divisions to operationalize the theory of threat assessment. The manual provides ready to use handouts, current resources, and key web sites for remaining informed of new developments in the field of threat assessment, school violence, and bullying. Some team members that had taken the threat assessment workshops through the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Crisis Response, stated that the information and protocols were very good but many still felt under prepared to carry out the recommendations, it is hoped that the manual will provide some of the missing links to ensure teams have access to the information and hands on resources to carry on with multidisciplinary threat assessment.

Limitations of the manual include the region specific information related to legislation, ethics, and school board policies. Access to outside agencies and opportunities

for multidisciplinary collaboration varies from province to province dependent upon service delivery models and scopes of service of providers.

Another limitation of the manual is the need for annual update of key contacts, resource numbers, and legislation. This step although time consuming, ensures ongoing contact with collaborative partners, provides opportunity for multidisciplinary updating of policies, staff changes, and potential barriers to involvement allowing proactive planning to occur.

Future Research Directions

The use of threat assessment teams in schools is a new way to address the threatening behaviours of students in schools. There are many areas in which the research lags behind practice and it is imperative that evaluation and research studies are initiated to evaluate the overall effect of threat assessment policies. Specific research studies addressing the underlying principles of threat assessment models such as the TES need to be further studied to determine whether the typologies for schools and students can actually be validated through qualitative study. Further data related to the numbers of school divisions using threat assessment models to address student threats, effectiveness of multidisciplinary threat assessment teams, and costs of threat assessment models are some of the questions to be answered by future research. Other specific questions include:

- How many school divisions in Alberta and across Canada have adopted threat assessment models to address school violence?
- What is the incidence rate per student population of threat assessments conducted per school division that has adopted threat assessment models?

- Do staff, parents, and students perceive that threat assessment models are improving school rates of identifying and supporting at-risk students?
- How many students are assessed as being at low, moderate, and high risk per year and how many of the students assessed received some form of intervention?
- Have threat assessment procedures increased student, parent, staff, and public perception that our schools are safe and caring places?
- What impact do the anniversaries of tragic events of school shootings have on the fear level of students, staff, parents and communities?
- How effective are violence prevention programs in reducing school violence?
- What relationship exists between different proposed typologies of perpetrators of school violence?
- What are the inherent risks and benefits of using behavioural typologies to categorize individuals?
- What impact does threat assessment participation have on individual team members?

Due to the scarcity of Canadian threat assessment literature there exists a huge potential for both qualitative and quantitative research to be initiated. I am interested in qualitative studies evaluating the effectiveness of threat assessment programs within the Livingstone Range School Division, the demand for threat assessment team evaluations, occurrence rates of threats, and prevalence of interventions carried out for students assessed for threat-making behaviours. I am also interested in how the implementation of threat

assessment protocols have influenced student, staff, parent, and community perceptions of whether the Livingstone Range Schools are safe and caring places for students.

Conclusions

Tracing the development of threat assessment protocols currently in use in several Alberta school divisions, interviews with multidisciplinary professionals participating on threat assessment teams, and the creation of a manual for the effective implementation of rural threat assessment teams highlighted several important considerations for government ministries that are charged with the responsibility of providing services for children and youth. Firstly, the Government of Alberta has recognized that there is a need for improved services for children and youth in Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2000). Initiatives including the Safe and Caring Schools Project (Alberta Teacher's Association, 1999), the Taber Response Project, projects that arose from the Premier's Task Force Report on Children at Risk (Government of Alberta, 2000) such as the Roundtable Discussions on Violence and Bullying (Government of Alberta, 2004) and the Building Capacity for Risk/Threat Assessment and Crisis Response Workshops (Snatic, 2004) demonstrate an awareness of the need for both children, youth, families, and service providers to access current research pertaining to the prevention of violence in general whether at home or in school.

One concern regarding the sustainability of threat assessment relates to the ongoing costs of maintaining the program. Financial support, continued support by multiple agencies, and access to appropriate infrastructure within Alberta Learning must be secured to ensure that the research recommendations and the enthusiasm for continued implementation of comprehensive school safety planning can be sustained within the local school and

community systems. Threat assessment is a vital component of an overall school safety plan. Ensuring collaborative, well functioning teams requires financial support to allow for release time of team members to carry out their functions, for on-going training costs, and to fund evaluative processes that are capable of providing data about the effectiveness of threat assessment teams in identifying youth at risk of carrying out threats, the prevention of school targeted violence (and other significant threats of violence), the effectiveness of threat assessment management plans, and the overall effectiveness of helping at-risk youth access appropriate services in a timely manner. Infrastructure that is needed to sustain the implementation of safe school initiatives such as the use of multidisciplinary threat assessment teams include: access to trained professionals to provide guidance in creating and implementing threat assessment protocols that are relevant to the unique circumstances of individual school divisions, access for rural divisions to school threat assessment professionals for consultative purposes, and continued access to provincial trainers of threat assessment.

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APPENDIX A

Ethics Interim Approval Certificate



MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 17, 2004

TO: **Brenda Bryson**

COPY: Paul Jerry (Supervisor)
Janice Green, Secretary, Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
Dr. Deborah Hurst, Chair, Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

FROM: Dr. Gina Wong-Wylie, Chair, CAAP Research Ethics Review Committee

SUBJECT: **Ethics Proposal #CAAP-04-01: “Creating Effective Rural School Threat Assessment Teams”**

The Campus Alberta Applied Psychology (CAAP) Research Ethics Review Committee, acting under authority of the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board to provide an expedited process of review for minimal risk student researcher projects, has reviewed the above-noted proposal and supporting documentation.

I am pleased to advise that this project has been awarded interim **APPROVAL TO PROCEED**. **You may begin your research immediately.**

Your application will be received by the Athabasca University Research Board at their next monthly meeting, and final ethical approval will be issued from that office.

As implementation of the proposal progresses, if you need to make any significant changes or modifications prior to receipt of a final approval memo from the AU Research Ethics Board, please forward this information immediately to the CAAP Research Ethics Review Committee via Dr. Gina Wong-Wylie, for further review.

Please be advised that the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board retains the right to request further information, or to revoke this interim approval, at any time prior to issuance of the final approval.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact ginaw@athabascau.ca.

APPENDIX B

Instrument 1: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Sheet

CREATING EFFECTIVE RURAL SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS

Brenda Bryson, Campus Alberta Master's Project Research

Dear research participant,

This is a Research Study about rural school threat assessment teams located in the Livingstone Range School Division. A copy of the Research Ethics Board Approval for this project can be provided by the Principle researcher at your request.

Age:

- 18-30
- 31-50
- Over 50

Gender:

- Female
- Male

How many threat assessments have you participated in as a member of the school threat assessment team?

Please identify your occupation and employing agency.

Educational Background:

Please indicate any training in counselling, threat or risk assessment that you have taken.

APPENDIX C

Threat Assessment Team Interview Guide

1. Describe your role as a member of the school threat assessment team.
2. What do you think is the main mission of the threat assessment team?
3. Do you think your team is currently meeting its mission? Why or why not.
4. How has the implementation of school threat assessment teams impacted the safety of school populations?
5. What do you think are the necessary personal and professional qualities to participate as a threat assessment team member?
6. Describe the characteristics of an effective team member.
7. What training or in-service do you think is necessary to prepare a team member from your discipline to be an effective team member.
8. Do you have any ethical concerns or constraints that impact your ability to fully participate on the team? If yes, please describe.
9. How do you think your threat assessment team could be improved?
10. Does your agency have any protocols or guidelines for responding to school targeted threats? If yes, please describe.
11. What advice would you give to a rural school division just beginning the process of implementing school threat assessment teams?

APPENDIX D

Recruitment Notice

Dear School Threat Assessment Team Member,

RE: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study about Rural School Threat Assessment Teams

School based threat assessment teams have been instituted in the Livingstone Range School Division and other southern Albertan school divisions as a response to a perceived need for coordinated intentional responses to threats of violence targeted towards schools. This study is intended to generate information on the structure and function of threat assessment teams in Livingstone Range School and to generate feedback and insight that could be applied to the creation of a training manual for rural school threat assessment teams. The information generated through interviews will be used for the creation of a threat assessment team training manual that may be used by schools, for research and educational purposes, and may be presented at professional conferences and through published works. Key themes will be identified from the data and may be reported according to agency background of the participants. Key agency participants in this study include school counsellors, school administrators, the RCMP, community mental health counsellors and children service workers.

Participant confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study by keeping participant demographic information separate from interview notes. Participant demographic information will be stored separate from information recorded during the interview. Raw interview data will only be viewed by Brenda Bryson and her direct project supervisor, Paul Jerry. All electronic, paper, and related documents will be stored in a secure, locked, confidential filing cabinet and destroyed on or before January 30th, 2008. Data from the interview process and notes from the interview will be shredded by Brenda Bryson and electronic records pertaining to the interview will be erased by Brenda Bryson. All electronic files will be stored on a secure server. Password protection will be used throughout the study to ensure privacy.

If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions about it, please call Brenda Bryson at 403-625-3213 or e-mail btbryson@telusplanet.net by November 30th. Questions about this project may be directed to Brenda's program supervisor, Dr. Paul Jerry at (403) 528-1451, paulj@athabascau.ca.

Sincerely,

Brenda Bryson,

B. EdGraduate Student, Campus Alberta Applied Psychology

Primary Researcher

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Form

Brenda Bryson
Principal Investigator
Campus Alberta Applied Psychology Graduate Program
Telephone: 403-625-3213
e-mail: btbryson@telusplanet.net

Paul Jerry, Project Supervisor
Centre for Graduate Education in Applied Psychology
Athabasca University
Telephone: (403)-528-1451 paulj@athabascau.ca

Research Purpose: The purpose of this research is to compile information for a training manual that will provide suggestions for how to implement an effective multi-disciplinary rural school threat assessment team.

When participating, you will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes on the topic of school based threat assessment teams. Prior to the interview, you will be provided with an Informed Consent Form and a Demographic Sheet to complete.

Your involvement in this study is voluntary and this means that you:

- May opt out of answering any question(s) at any point in time.
- Can withdraw from the study at any time either before or after consent of participation without negative consequences. The information that you have shared with me prior to your withdrawal will be used only with your permission. If you decline this permission, I will destroy all electronic and print materials.

Accounts in the study will not include your name but information may be summarized and reported by occupations such as community mental health worker, RCMP, children service worker, school counsellor or school administrator. The information that you share will be used for the creation of a threat assessment team training manual that may be used by schools, for research and educational purposes, and may be presented at professional conferences and through published works.

There are no known risks to individuals participating in this study.

Name (please print)

Date

Signature

Primary Researcher

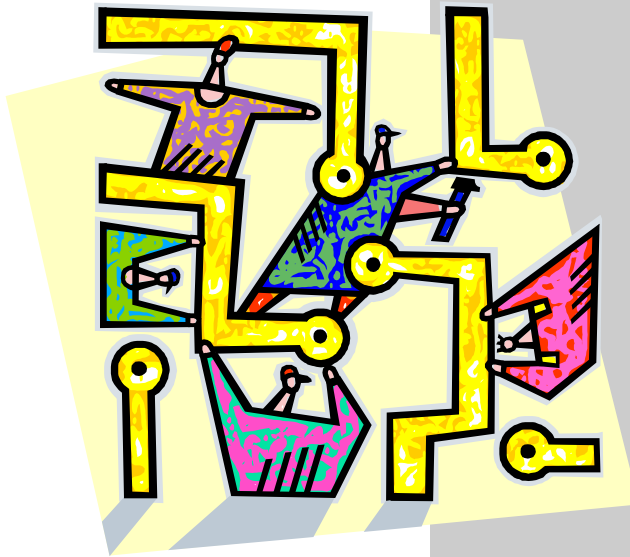
APPENDIX F

Training Manual

SCHOOL THREAT

Creating Effective Rural
Multidisciplinary Teams

Brenda Bryson



May 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Executive Summary	2
Rationale for School Threat Assessment	3
Learning from LRSD Threat Assessment Team Members.....	7
Terminology Used in the Manual.....	12
Literature Review of School Threat Assessment.....	15
United States	15
Canada	24

CHAPTER 2: GUIDING POLICY

LRSD Threat Assessment Policy	32
Documentation Requirements.....	39
Agency Boundaries within the LRSD	39
Crisis Response Flip Chart	45

CHAPTER 3: ESTABLISHING A TEAM

Rural Realities and Creating Effective TATs	48
Assessing Community Capacity and Resources.....	50
Recruiting Tips	54
Team Member Roles.....	55
Threat Assessment Member Qualities	58
Multidisciplinary Teams: Planning Success	60
Implementation and Management Considerations.....	60
Additional Barriers to Success	61

Financial Considerations of Implementing School Threat Assessment Teams.....	61
Training Standards.....	62
LRSD Training Plan	63
Meeting Guidelines for Training Purposes	64
Evaluating Team Effectiveness	64
Team Meeting Data Review Questions.....	65
Ethical and Legal Considerations.....	67
Ethical Use of Information and Documentation	69
CHAPTER 4: RESOURCES	
Risk Assessment Tools.....	71
Other Assessment Tools.....	74
Resources for Multidisciplinary Threat Assessment Teams.....	76
Ethical Decision Making	81
CHAPTER 5: HANDOUTS	
Key Developments of Threat Assessment Protocols – Canada and the United States.	83
FBI Four-Prong Threat Assessment Model	87
Key Findings of the Safe School Initiative	89
TES Student Typologies.....	90
School Typologies	92
School Crisis/Trauma Events Summary Record	93
Divisional Crisis/Trauma Events Summary Record	94
Interview Guiding Questions.....	96
Sample Multidisciplinary Threat Assessment Meeting Agenda	97

Sample Debriefing Meeting Agenda 98
Threat Assessment Incident Report 99
Quotable Quotes 100
REFERENCES..... 101



CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School-based multidisciplinary threat assessment teams have emerged preferred method of evaluating and managing threats of violence in schools (McCann, 2002; Fein et al, 2002; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). Increased media attention to acts of school targeted violence have increased public fears of violence in schools, despite the fact that schools remain one of the safest places for our children to be (Hyman & Snook, 2000). The United States Secret Service and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have completed the most extensive research of school targeted violence and from their findings have proposed assessment procedures that recognize that students that engage in targeted school violence do not fit the traditional profiles of students at-risk of committing violent acts.

The recommendations of the reports of the Secret Service (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002) and the FBI (O'Toole, 2000), the availability of threat assessment training programs for schools such as the Traumatic Events System (TES) model (Cameron & Woods, 2001; 2004; 2005), and the implementation of multidisciplinary threat assessment teams in schools has occurred in many school divisions across North America including the Livingstone Range School Division (LRSD).

The purpose of this manual is to provide information and resources to improve the quality of rural multidisciplinary threat assessment teams and to implement the recommendations made by leading experts in the field of threat assessment. Selection of material for the manual was guided by information gained

through interviews with members of the LRSD multidisciplinary threat assessment teams and through research in the area of threat assessment and children service focused multidisciplinary teams.

RATIONALE FOR SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT

April 20th, 1999 two students walked into Columbine High School, Colorado and embarked on what would later be termed by the media “a school rampage” that left fifteen dead (National School Safety Center, 2004), 23 injured (Dedman, 2000) and ensured no person with access to media could remain immune from the horrific possibilities of school targeted violence. A scant eight days later, in the small rural town of Taber, tucked in the bible belt of southern Alberta, the unthinkable happened, a school shooting that left one dead, one injured, and unexpectedly large impact zone of traumatized students, schools, communities, and even nations. The Taber School Shooting solidified the growing awareness that schools are not immune from violence and that maybe it is time that schools examined more closely not only how to respond to critical incidents but how to prevent a proliferation of violence in schools. Although the statistics in both Canada and the United States recognize that school shootings, school targeted violence, and extreme forms of aggression are rare occurrences, there still exists a need to explore what can be done to minimize the opportunity for another Columbine or Taber tragedy.

The Taber School shooting occurred in what might be considered one of the best prepared school divisions in Alberta to handle crisis response. Horizon School Division had already begun interagency discussions and planning regarding how to respond to a community or school crisis. The discussions allowed for the

rapid deployment of a multidisciplinary crisis response team that was able to provide immediate service to the school community. Within days of the Taber tragedy, the Government of Alberta established the Taber Response Project with the purpose of taking a regional lead in understanding and recovering from the aftermath of the shooting. The Taber Response Project was led by Lorita Ichikawa from the Alberta Mental Health Board and Kevin Cameron, Team Leader of the Taber Response Team. Following the creation of the Taber Response Team Project, the Government of Alberta initiated the Premier's Task Force on Children at Risk. The Task Force reported its findings in the document "Start Young, Start Now! Report of the Task Force on Children at Risk" (Government of Alberta, 2000) and a summary of the Taber Response Project (Ichikawa, 2000), and an Interim Protocol for Dealing with High Risk Behaviours (Cameron & Sawyer, 2000) were included as Appendixes. The Taber Response Project and Premier's Task Force were to be catalysts for the implementation of threat assessment protocols in many school divisions across Canada.

One initiative that served as a motivator for school divisions working to improve their school safety plans was a workshop offered in the 2001-2002 school year to 35 communities across Alberta. The workshop Building Community Capacity for Risk/Threat Assessment and Crisis Response Training (CRACR) (Alberta Mental Health Board & Children's Mental Health, 2001) was offered collaboratively by a multidisciplinary team of professionals representing Mental Health, Education, and the Solicitor General. CTRCR training was provided for educators, counsellors,

school resource officers, children service workers, RCMP, mental health therapists, community members and related health professionals with the goals of:

- ☐ enhancement of capacity to create safe and caring schools.
- ☐ development or enhancement of risk/threat assessment teams.
- ☐ development or enhancement of school-based crisis response protocols.
- ☐ development or enhancement of post-crisis response teams, protocols and resources.

(Snatic, 2004)

The CTRCR workshops helped in the process of strengthening multidisciplinary ties at a community level. School divisions such as the LRSD, quickly realized that further training and on-going in-service was essential to maintain the momentum toward the implementation of multidisciplinary threat assessment teams. At the end of the 13 month (extended from the original 3 month term) Taber Response Project, and the 10 month CTRCR project it became a local school division responsibility to locate and find continued training opportunities for members of the school threat assessment teams.

Following his secondment to the Taber Response Project, Kevin Cameron and Glenn Woods, Criminal Profiler for the RCMP funded with a grant secured from the Canadian Federal Justice Department prepared threat assessment training programs and protocols reflecting the key recommendations of the United States Secret Service report *The Safe School Initiative (SSI)* (Vossekuil et al., 2002), the *SSI Companion Report for Schools* (Fein et al., 2002), the Federal Bureau of Investigations report *The School Shooter* (O'Toole, 2000) and the Traumatic Events

System (TES) model (Cameron & Woods, 2001; 2004) for managing threats and trauma responses in schools affected by violence.

The model of threat assessment that forms the framework for this manual is that described by Cameron and Woods (2001; 2004; 2005) as the Traumatic Events System (TES). TES applies a systems framework for understanding the contextual factors and dynamics of a particular school system that may influence the both the likelihood of an increase in threat making behaviours in a system or that might change the significance attributed to a specific threat. The model was derived after the completion of grounded research following the Taber Response Project, through consultations between Cameron and the FBI, Secret Service, and by interviews between Cameron and personnel and crisis responders from other schools that had experienced school targeted violence (Cameron & Woods, 2004; 2005). The model contributed to the threat assessment literature by:

- explaining school responses to traumatic events through the use of school typologies
- identifying how individual school traumatic events may elevate risk for threat making behaviours in other schools
- recognizing critical time periods following a traumatic event that require more vigilant evaluation of threats
- creating behavioural typologies of students that commit school targeted violence.

One study currently underway that may provide more information regarding the validity of the proposed typologies is *The Evolutionary Pathway to Violence: A Study*

of Youth Homicide research project conducted by Dr. William Pollack, Dr. Sybille Artz, Kevin Cameron, and the RCMP Behavioural Branch (K. Cameron, personal communication, April 8th, 2005).

The LRSD implemented policy that directed all schools in the LRSD to establish multidisciplinary threat assessment teams (Lorenz, 2001; LRSD, 2004). The threat assessment protocols adopted the works of the FBI (O'Toole, 2000) the Secret Services *Safe School Initiatives* (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002), and the threat assessment training protocols recommended in the Threat Assessment Training Guide (Cameron & Woods, 2001; 2004). The implementation of LRSD multidisciplinary teams began in the 2001-2002 school year. Now in the fourth year of implementation, stories of success and challenges are emerging.

LEARNING FROM LRSD THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM MEMBERS

Threat assessment teams are a relatively new intervention in Canadian and American schools, with little research conducted on implementation barriers and recommendations for successful implementation. To gather data and insight on the topic of multidisciplinary school threat assessment teams, fourteen participants were selected from threat assessment teams from across the Livingstone Range School Division. A minimum of two participants were chosen from each discipline represented on LRSD threat assessment teams including mental health workers, school-based counsellors (high school counsellors and family school liaison counsellors), school administrators, RCMP, and children service workers. Since the LRSD is served by five different RCMP detachments, two children service authorities, and two health regions, care was taken to recruit participants from a

range of service areas. Participation in the study was voluntary and agency approval obtained prior to approaching potential participants. Participants had completed at least one multidisciplinary threat assessment. Interview data was compiled and analyzed to identify trends and to identify information applicable to the creation of this threat assessment team training manual. A summary of the key themes from interviews follows.

Common Themes Expressed Across Disciplines

- ☐ Members do not want to feel that they are singularly responsible for making the final decision as to the assessment of risk.
- ☐ Generally agree the process is appropriate and leads to at-risk students receiving better services.
- ☐ Better than using punishment as response to threats.
- ☐ Want to know who is in charge of process and who is tracing whether recommendations are followed.
- ☐ Team members are bound by professional ethics that share common themes such as “the duty to protect” (counsellors) or “in the best interest of the child” (children services) that in very specific situations may allow directly relevant information to be shared.
- ☐ Most stated that everyone in the group was bound by confidentiality rules by virtue of profession/agency and that although they may not have been able to share specific information they were able to communicate enough information to contribute to the process.

- q Some agency personnel felt that sometimes too much information and details were shared around the table, possibly more than necessary.

RCMP

- q Viewed threat assessment process as improvement in dealing with students.
- q Process opens up doors for better flow of information and for the chance to do more preventative work.
- q Want to be consulted earlier than later, phone consultation fine if full team not called.
- q Fits mandate of community and preventative policing.

Child and Family Service Workers

- q Managers were involved in development of threat assessment policies and support use of multidisciplinary teams.
- q Need to be aware of protocol of Children Services office that you are calling to avoid delays. Each is committed to attending and wants calls to go first to intake line. Each office has its own protocol to follow from that point to make available a worker.
- q See the networking/relationship building between agencies as very valuable.
- q Child and Family Services has under gone many changes over the past 10 years and programs change, therefore participation helps to provide opportunities to share info re: programming and

services...helps to avoid families/students being referred to appropriate services.

Mental Health

- ☐ Different regions with significantly different protocols and services.
- ☐ Some want to see the full team at med/high risk threat assessments.
- ☐ Some difficulties with issue of confidentiality
- ☐ Therapists had different opinions on whether the therapist that attends the threat assessment meeting should later conduct a risk assessment.
- ☐ Concern expressed about ethics of participating in an assessment of risk without having the opportunity to meet student/parents.
- ☐ Confusion over what is being expected of therapist at threat assessment meeting – expectations differ to wide range of factors including administrator style, whether the TA is the first one at the school, whether TA team has experience, and awareness of division protocols.

General Recommendations

- ☐ Clearly designate who is team leader and responsibilities.
- ☐ Address confidentiality more specifically in policy.
- ☐ Negotiate with agencies what information is recorded, who has access, and where it will be stored.
- ☐ Fair warning letters and TA policies need to be specific, and clearly communicated to parents and students.

- q Educate students and staff about sharing information about threats to school based threat assessment team.
- q Common, on-going threat assessment training, available to all agencies involved is necessary.
- q Plan debriefing of events and invite all agencies to participate.
- q Strategic consideration of who interviews students needs to be determined based on skills of team members.
- q Consider conducting mock threat assessments for schools that have not had a need to conduct a threat assessment in the past year to provide members opportunity to meet and work together.
- q Review division safety plans (which includes threat assessment and crisis response teams) annually and invite agency partners to participate.

From the information gained through interviews and review of current threat assessment models and research, the following manual was created to assist in the process of implementing collaborative multidisciplinary threat assessment teams in rural school divisions.

TERMINOLOGY USED IN THE MANUAL

Terms such as threat and risk vary in meaning depending upon the context in which they are used. For the purposes of this manual definitions that are reflective of the research on threat assessment in schools has been used. It is vital that team members have a shared understanding of how these terms are used during the threat assessment process to reduce unnecessary confusion.

Risk assessment: Process of determining if a student may pose a risk to some unknown target or targets at some unknown period of time. A lengthier process than utilizes tests and measures threat that falls beyond the scope of a school-based multidisciplinary team (Cameron & Sawyer, 2004, p.4).

Threat Assessment: Process of determining if a threat maker actually poses a risk to the target or targets that they have threatened. Involves collection of data, and structured interviews to assess initial levels of risk that may be posed and plan risk reducing interventions (Cameron & Sawyer, 2004, p.4).

Threat: An expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. A threat can be spoken, written, or symbolic (O'Toole, 2000).

Worrisome Event: A generalized threat with no specific target that would not meet the legal standard of threat, but cause concern that a student might be moving toward a risk of violent behaviour (Cameron & Sawyer, 2004).

Exceptional Case: Worrisome behaviours that “occur in a setting where, by circumstance or design, there is an audience that may be traumatized and their reactions to the incident may trigger a broader trauma response in the school and community system” (Cameron, & Sawyer, 2004, p. 9).

Threat Making Behaviour: Any threat that meets the criteria of the Criminal Code of Canada Section 264.1 (1) of a person “who in any manner, knowingly utters, conveys or causes any person to receive a threat...to cause death or bodily harm” (as cited in Cameron & Sawyer, 2004, p. 7).

Immediate Risk Situation: A threat is posed that is specific and plausible requiring immediate police intervention not threat assessment (Cameron & Sawyer, 2004).

Traumatic Event: A traumatic event is a highly unexpected event that impacts multiple systems, and it is more difficult to predict what and how many other systems that will be affected (Cameron & Woods, 2005).

Crisis Event: A crisis is an event that is confined to the system in which it occurs (such as a school, or a family), it is a predicted event or reasonably expected event for the population (such as death of someone with cancer, a suicide of a high school student), and there exists a high capacity for predicting who will be impacted by the event (Cameron & Woods, 2005).

School Counsellor: In the LRSD, school counsellors are located primarily in High Schools, have teacher certification, and often maintain teaching loads in addition to counselling duties.

Family School Liaison (FSL) Counsellor: In the LRSD, FSL counsellors work primarily in Elementary and Junior High Schools, have professional qualifications in the fields of counselling psychology, social work, psychiatric nursing, or educational psychology, and often serve more than one school.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT

United States

Key Developments 1992-1997

Several significant studies and acts of legislation propelled the creation of school threat assessment models in the United States. In 1992, the Secret Service initiated the Exceptional Case Study Project (ECSP), a five year project funded by the United States Department of Justice. The study completed a review of the behaviours of individuals who carried out or attempted lethal attacks on public or prominent officials in the United States. It is here that the term “targeted violence” was defined as a specific form of violence possessing identifiable characteristics and precursors, different from violence in general (Vossekuil et al., 2002). The United States Federal government continued to advocate for better knowledge of violence in schools as part of the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) by calling for comprehensive assessment of objective data related to the prevalence and type of violence and drug use in the nation’s schools (National Education Goals Panel, 1998). Educators then began to search for effective ways to both identify and provide effective intervention to reduce acts of student initiated violence (Ryan-Arredondo et al., 2001).

Key Developments 1998

Two other events in 1998 that contributed to the research field of threat assessment and school targeted violence were the creation of the National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) by the Secret Service and the initiation of a research project by the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) (O’Toole, 2000).

National Threat Assessment Center

The National Threat Assessment Center was created as a means to share research and information about targeted violence gathered through the experiences and research of the Secret Services. This information was made specifically available to law enforcement personnel through the document “Protective Intelligence and Threat Assessment Investigations: A Guide for State Law Enforcement Personnel” (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998).

Case Study Research 1999-2000

Case study research has focused on American school shootings and varies in depth and accuracy. Commonly referenced studies in the literature include the *Risk Factors in School Shootings* review completed by Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas (2000) and *The Classroom Avenger* by McGee and DeBernardo (1999).

Risk Factors in School Shootings Study

Verlinden and colleagues (Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000) reviewed nine incidents of multiple homicides in American schools. This report provided a thorough review of the literature regarding individual, family, societal, and situational risk factors for youth violence as well as risk assessment methods. The study included a comparison of warning signs and risk factors published on youth violence resulting in a concise list of risk factors. Subsequent comprehensive studies of school shooters disputed the accuracy of the following risk factors named in the Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas study: troubled parent-child relationships, ineffective parenting, poor social skills, ineffective coping skills, and isolation and rejection from peers (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002). Another weakness of the study

included the minimal explanation of the selection procedures that resulted in the nine cases chosen for review. These researchers did not have open access to all documents related to the individual shooters and used media reports as a means to obtain data which resulted in the inclusion of erroneous information in some cases, therefore, the resulting 'characteristics' of school shooters described must be viewed cautiously. Areas for further research were clearly identified by the authors and included recommendations for more specific studies on risk factors and protective factors for specific forms of violence, a need to develop risk assessment tools, and studies assessing why youth often do not report threats of violence made by peers.

Classroom Avenger Study

The McGee and DeBernardo (1999) analysis possessed similar methodological flaws and inaccuracies to the Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas (2000) study revealed after the Secret Service conducted more in depth case study reviews (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002). The *Classroom Avenger* behavioural profile was prepared after a review of twelve select school shootings that occurred in the United States. Unconfirmed information reported in police reports and information reported in the media was used by the authors in the creation of their profiles in response to limited access to forensic information and primary sources (McGee & DeBernardo). The small data base, unconfirmed facts, and lack of access to critical information specific to the individual shooters rendered the profiles unreliable and potentially harmful if used to identify students inappropriately.

National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime Study

The NCAVC initiated a study in 1998 of eighteen completed or foiled school shootings from a behavioural perspective. The case study research reviewed the individual incidents, focusing on individual characteristics of the shooter, his (all shooters were male) family background, school contextual factors, and other social dynamics. In addition to case review, researchers conducted a symposium (1999 Leesburg, Virginia) where school staff, administrators, and law enforcement personnel from each of the eighteen schools in the study were able to meet and discuss school shootings and threat assessment along with leading experts in adolescent violence, suicidology, mental health and related social science fields (O'Toole, 2000).

Results of the NCAVC study were used to create a model of threat assessment outlined in the document *The School Shooter* (O'Toole, 2000). The four-prong threat assessment model is a process of making informed judgments about the plausibility of threats made and the extent of the threat maker to have the “resources, intent, and motivation to carry out the threat” (p. 5). The model defines a threat as “an expression to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. A threat can be spoken, written, or symbolic” (p. 6) and can be classed into four categories: *direct, indirect, veiled, or conditional* (p.6). The model views violence as an evolutionary pathway moving from vague, indirect, implausible threats (low level of threat) to those that are highly specific, direct, and plausible (high level of threat). Assessment of the threat maker involves the exploration of four

prongs: individual dynamics, family dynamics, school dynamics, and social dynamics (see handout in chapter five).

Many of the warning traits listed in the four-prong assessment model (O'Toole, 2000) are characteristics and traits encountered by staff and student in schools on a daily basis, yet most students that exhibit these signs do not engage in targeted school violence, and judicious care must be taken to avoid inaccurately labeling students as potentially violent (Borum, 2000; Borum et al., 2000). The model clearly states that the signs are intended to be used only if a student poses a threat and not as a profiling tool for identifying potentially violent students and that a student needs to demonstrate a pattern of traits across the four prong areas. While the "School Shooter" (O'Toole, 2000) report provides a significant amount of data related to potential warning signs of violence the checklist style format also creates the possibility for misuse by school personnel that are not trained in the gathering and evaluation of assessment information. The model also requires assessors to possess a strong understanding of child and youth development and strong guided clinical judgment skills (Reddy et al., 2000) to ascertain what qualifies as significant behaviours. Specific protocols, training standards, and more structured procedures are needed to move the model from theory to practice. The difficulty of applying the four-prong model without adequate training and regard to the establishment of district policies and procedures was highlighted in a single case study review by Sacco and Larsen (2003).

Secret Service Threat Assessment Research 2002

Safe School Initiative

The most comprehensive school shooting study completed to date was commissioned by the Safe School Initiative (SSI) and its findings are reported in *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications For the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States* (Vossekuil et al., 2002) and the companion report *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates* (Fein et al., 2002). The methodology of the study was clearly described in the Final Report and met a high standard of research design. This Secret Service study reviewed the 37 known incidents of targeted school violence in the U.S. from December 1974 to May 2000. The researchers had access, as with the O'Toole (2000) study, to extensive information including interviews with ten of the perpetrators of targeted school violence events. Key findings of the SSI can be found in chapter five.

Threat assessment approaches were originally advocated within the Secret Service as a preventative strategy for reducing assassination attempts and provided the framework for "identifying, assessing, and managing persons who pose a risk for targeted violence" (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998; Reddy et al., 2000, p.167). Secret Service knowledge of threats combined with what revealed in the school shooting study was used to create a model of threat assessment for school systems to prevent targeted school violence (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002). The threat assessment approach combines the use of structured clinical interview questions with available data known about precursors to targeted school violence

versus reliance on general indicators of violence in youth. Three principles guide the threat assessment process:

- ☐ Violence is seen as the product of an interaction among the perpetrator, situation, target, and the setting.
- ☐ There is a distinction between making a threat and posing a threat.
- ☐ Targeted violence is not random or spontaneous (Fein & Vossekuil).

The threat assessment models suggested by the Secret Service and the FBI are being incorporated into threat assessment training programs across North America but research into the efficacy of the model, accuracy of the assessments, and ease with which school divisions are able to implement the models is still scarce.

Key Development 2004

School-based Risk Assessment (SBRA)

Halikias (2004) proposed a model for assessing student risk of serious violence in schools that combines traditional risk assessment of with the Secret Service model of school targeted threat assessment (Fein et al, 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002). The SBRA reflects a “pragmatic and clinical” (Halikias, 2004, p.598) approach to school risk assessment that emphasizes the importance of social context when interpreting student behaviours and demonstrates the shift in focus from traditional predictions of future violence potential and identification and punishment of violent behaviours to identification of potential intervention services and support for the student at risk of violence. The term “dangerousness” and “threat assessment” (p.599) are used by Halikias to differentiate between two types of students that may be referred for SBRA.

Students at risk for “dangerous” behaviour are defined as those students that have established previous patterns of anger management problems and violence, exhibit impulsive and explosive behaviours and may already be labelled with conduct or emotional disorders. A significant quantity of research has been conducted on this population to determine predictors of youth violence (Hawkins et al., 1998; Thornberry, Huizinga, & Loeber, 1995; Thornberry, 1998) and the data generated utilized in the creation of second generation risk assessments (Monahan & Steadman, 1994).

The second group of atypical students is those discussed in the threat assessment literature. These students create plans for targeted school violence and information generated about this group was derived primarily from the research of the United States Secret Service through the Safe School Initiative (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002). Halikias (2004) utilizes the data on the two types of students to create a process for ensuring that school assessments result in the recommendation of interventions and case management strategies that are matched to the profile of the offender as either a student with a high risk for engaging in “dangerous” violence or school targeted violence. In addition to using a contextual, dynamic interview approach adapted from Borum (1999) and the Safe School Initiative (Fein et al., 2002), Halikias also suggests a method for further categorizing students based on a proposed five typology system. The categories go beyond students that may be at risk for committing targeted school violence to include all students at risk for committing violence.

The primary factor used in the creation of the categories is the student's motivation for committing the act. This factor is considered an important criterion for choosing the most effective intervention and case management strategies. The categories described by Halikias (2004) are not empirically determined or based on any proven classification system. Halikias explains the use of the categories as a way to discourage assessors from stereotyping students and as a means to help assessors to intentionally recommend interventions and strategies appropriate for the type of student referred.

The specific protocol suggested for the assessing psychologist mirrors the recommendations of the SSI (Fein et al., 2002) and the Cameron and Woods (2001; 2004) threat assessment process except the Halikias (2004) model is a unilateral assessment versus a multi-disciplinary assessment. In the completion of a SBRA the psychologist is charged with reviewing the available historical information, conducting interviews with parents, staff, the student and collaterals. The psychologist then assesses the information and prepares a recommended management and intervention plan. This model represents an improvement over models that focus exclusively on school-targeted violence which represents a very small percentage of the actual violence committed in schools, it lacks however, a multi-disciplinary collaborative approach to gathering, evaluating, and creating effective practical violence management plans. The model also lacks any significant discussion of how this model would be implemented within a school system or who would be responsible for costs. Many rural school systems in Alberta do not have

staff psychologists, and access to mental health personnel with specialized training in youth violence risk assessment is rare.

Canada

Key Developments 1999-2000

Taber Response Project

Following the Taber shooting, the Government of Alberta established the Taber Response Project with the purpose of taking a regional lead in understanding and recovering from the aftermath of the shooting. The Taber Response Project seconded Lorita Ichikawa from the Alberta Mental Health Board and Kevin Cameron, Team Leader of the Taber Response Team from Horizon School Division. The findings of the Taber Response Project were published in the Premier's Task Force on Children At-Risk (Government of Alberta, 2000) and recommended that risk assessment protocols be developed by school districts to evaluate serious threats made by youth and that professionals have training in risk assessment based on updated (post school shooting) expertise (2000).

Building Community Capacity for Risk/Threat Assessment and Crisis

Response Training Initiative

The Alberta Government in response to the Premier's Report of the Task Force (Government of Alberta, 2000) initiated the Building Community Capacity for Risk/Threat Assessment and Crisis Response Training Initiative (CRACR). This initiative involved the creation of a two day workshop with the goal of providing information related to improving crisis response teams and creation of threat assessment protocols in schools. The workshop was delivered by facilitators

representing Alberta Mental Health, Alberta Education, and the office of the Solicitor General (Snatic, 2004). The workshops were delivered across Alberta to multi-disciplinary audiences of school personnel, mental health, RCMP, children services workers, health professionals, school trustees and community members at large during the 2001-2002 school year. Workshops such as the CRACR (Snatic, 2004) and those offered through the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response led to the development and enhancement of threat assessment and crisis response protocols in many school divisions including the LRSD.

Threat Assessment Training Programs

Cameron and Glenn Woods, Criminal Profiler for the RCMP with a grant secured from the Canadian Federal Justice Department prepared training programs focusing on threat assessment following the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Secret Service Models as well as an original Traumatic Events System Model (TES) (Cameron, 2000; Cameron, Sawyer, & Urbanoski, 2003; Sawyer & Cameron, 2001) for dealing with threats in schools and the traumatic response of systems affected by violence. Threat assessment training for educators, counsellors, school resource officers, and other school staff has occurred throughout Alberta and other parts of Canada but, to date, no studies of the effectiveness and impact of the training has been completed. Current literature supports threat assessment models as the preferred model for addressing violence in schools (Cameron, Sawyer, & Urbanoski, 2003; Fein et al, 2002; Reddy et al., 2001; Vossekuil et al., 2002) but further research into the implementation of the model, effects of the model on reducing

school violence, and accuracy of model in identifying students at risk of committing targeted school violence is necessary.

Systems dynamics. The TES (Cameron & Woods, 2005; applies a systems framework for understanding the contextual factors and dynamics of a particular school system that may influence the both the likelihood of an increase in threat making behaviours in a system or that might change the significance attributed to a specific threat. This model fits the criteria of third generation risk assessment tools that combine static and dynamic risk factor analysis within a family systems theoretical framework. The model was derived after the completion of grounded research following the Taber Response Project, by consultations between Cameron and the FBI, Secret Service and by interviewing personnel and crisis responders from other schools that had been victims of violent school targeted violence (Cameron & Sawyer, 2001). The model contributed to the literature by identifying:

- differences in school responses to traumatic events
- how individual school traumatic events may elevate risk for threat making behaviours in other schools
- preventative data for identifying critical time periods that occur after a traumatic event that require more vigilant evaluation of threats

Similar to the Secret Service and FBI models of threat assessment the TES model emphasizes understanding the contextual features of systems to place the threat assessment team in a more informed position to evaluate data. The model proposes that accurate data combined with the analysis of the range of capacities of different school systems is more likely to result in effective threat management plans

based on the actual resources and capacity of the system at hand. Whether the model holds true, unfortunately, will depend on further data derived from further school traumatic events.

Crisis versus Traumatic Events

The TES model (Cameron & Woods, 2001; 2004; 2005) distinguishes between a traumatic event and a crisis event. A crisis is an event that is confined to the system in which it occurs (such as a school, or a family), it is a predicted event or reasonably expected event for the population (such as death of someone with cancer, a suicide of a high school student), and there exists a high capacity for predicting who will be impacted by the event. A traumatic event differs by being a highly unexpected event that impacts multiple systems, and it is more difficult to predict what and how many other systems that will be affected. For example, consider the difference in numbers of systems impacted by the Columbine tragedy, if no film footage had been available to the media (versus the three televised hours of the three hour and twenty minute event) (Cameron & Woods, 2005). Cameron suggests that although forty school shootings had occurred in the United States prior to Columbine, that this was possibly the first shooting that included Canada as part of the impact zone.

The TES model defines impact zones as the systems surrounding ground zero (site and community of the actual traumatic event) that experience significant behavioural and emotional responses to the trauma. Within the impact zone there may also be secondary trauma sites, defined as sites that have already experienced a trauma response to a similar traumatic event so that the site is actually

demonstrating behaviours and emotions similar to that found at ground zero.

Although the model focuses on trauma response which would seem to be occurring after the time in which a threat assessment would take place, it actually provides context relevant to accurately assessing the risk of threat making behaviours in the impact zone.

Cameron (Cameron & Woods, 2005) reports that threat making behaviours actually increase at reasonably predictable times following a traumatic event within an impact area. The five critical time periods for increased threat making and violent behaviours included the two week time period from the date of the traumatic event, one to one and a half months after the date of the event, the anniversary date of the event, when something similar to the original event occurs somewhere else, and other time periods directly related to a schools trauma history.

School Typologies

Similarities in how different schools responded and coped with the crisis arose as well as similarities in the typologies of both school systems and perpetrator individual characteristics. The model defines four typologies of school systems that can be viewed on a continuum from tragically closed systems (most dysfunctional) to tragically open systems with open to closed systems falling in the middle (see handout in chapter five. It is important that the threat assessment team and crisis responders understand how the school system is functioning in order to understand the school dynamics that may be impacting the data received during the threat assessment. The factors that influence where a school system fits on the continuum include:

Trauma history of the school and a general assessment of the schools pre-trauma functioning; leadership structure of the school; information sharing process between staff, students, and parents; relationship with crisis response team [and threat assessment team][sic]; requested focus of service delivery; beliefs and expectations about recovery; and affective range of the system. (Cameron & Woods, 2004, p. 32)

Student Typologies

Similar to Halikias (2004), Cameron has attempted to categorize the students that commit violent school acts into specific typologies based primarily on motivation for behaviours. Cameron classifies students as traditional-behavioural (T-bt), traditional-cognitive (T-ct), mixed (MT), and non-traditional (NT) (see handout). The primary difference to Cameron's proposed model from that of Halikias is referral criterion for evaluation. Halikias suggests all students that are exhibiting characteristics that suggest an increase in violent behaviour be referred for assessment. Violent behaviour in the absence of threats would still warrant a referral. In the TES model multidisciplinary assessment by the threat assessment team does not occur in the absence of a threat being posed to a specific target. It is unclear how students with aggressive or violent histories that do not threaten targeted school violence might fit into the typologies. A weakness of Cameron and Woods (2001; 2004; 2005) model is the lack of supporting research identifying the rationale for the typologies chosen. The model lacks a structured formalized process for applying the typologies to specific threat assessment situations raising concern of the validity of using the typology in the absence of specialized training. The

application of the typology framework depends upon contextual information that may either be unavailable until after a student carries out a threat or dependent upon subjective data that would need to be corroborated from multiple sources before applying.

Current literature supports threat assessment models as the preferred model for addressing targeted violence in schools (Cameron, Sawyer, & Urbanoski, 2003; Fein et al, 2002; Reddy et al., 2001; Vossekuil et al., 2002) but further research into the implementation of the model, effects of the model on reducing school violence, and accuracy of the model in identifying students at risk of committing targeted school violence is necessary.



CHAPTER 2

GUIDING POLICY

LRSD THREAT ASSESSMENT PROTOCOL

The following policy is taken from the 2004-2005 school year policy manual of the Livingstone Range School Division (LRSD, 2004)(used with permission). Discussion is currently underway that may alter the current policy and notes highlighted in yellow indicate revisions under discussion at this time.

7. THREAT ASSESSMENT PROTOCOL

7.1 WHAT IS A THREAT?

A threat is an expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. A threat can be spoken, written, or symbolic - for example, motioning with one's hands as though shooting at another person.
All threats are NOT treated as equal. However, all threats should be accessed in a timely manner and decisions regarding how they are handled must be done quickly. Threat assessment seeks to make an informed judgment on two questions: How credible and serious is the threat itself? To what extent does the threatener appear to have the resources, intent, and motivation to carry out the threat?

7.2 TYPES OF THREATS

Threats can be classified into four main categories: direct, indirect, veiled, or conditional.

1. **Direct threat** identifies a specific act against a specific target and is delivered in a straight forward, clear, and explicit manner: *I am going to place a bomb in the school gym.*
2. **Indirect threat** tends to be vague, unclear, and ambiguous. The plan, the intended victim, the motivation, and other aspects of the threat are masked: *If I wanted to, I could kill everyone at this school!* While violence is implied, the threat is phrased tentatively and suggests that a violent act **COULD** occur, not that it **WILL** occur.
3. **Veiled threat** is one that strongly implies but does not explicitly threaten violence. *We would be better off without you around anymore* clearly hints at a possible violent act, but leaves it to the potential victim to interpret the message and give a definite meaning to the threat.

4. **Conditional threat** is the type of threat often seen in extortion cases. It warns that a violent act will happen unless certain demands or terms are met: "If you don't pay me one million dollars, I will place a bomb in the school."

7.3 THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM

The Livingstone Range School Division is serviced by two regional health authorities: The Chinook Health Authority and the Calgary Health Region, and by RCMP detachments based out of the towns of Crowsnest Pass, Pincher Creek, Fort Macleod, Claresholm and Nanton. At each school site, the Threat Assessment Team will be comprised of the following:

1. Critical Intervention Team Leader -CITL
2. School Principal
3. RCMP member from appropriate detachment
4. Mental Health personnel
5. Family School Liaison/Native School Liaison/School Counselor
6. Child and Family Services

Note: The LRSD is currently discussing the use of the terms Stage One Threat Assessment Team to refer to the school based team consisting of administration, counsellor, and possibly RCMP. The full multidisciplinary team would be referred to as the Stage Two Threat Assessment Team and would consist of all stage one members plus mental health, RCMP, and child and family service workers.

Worrisome Behaviors

When students exhibit early warning signs or when generalized threats are uttered with no specific target (i.e. "I could kill somebody today"), the Principal may wish to contact the CITL for consultation to determine if the information or incident warrants an activation of the protocol for dealing with high risk behaviors. Depending on the nature of the incident, the Principal may also consult with the RCMP, counselors and/or mental health personnel. This allows the Principal to consult confidentially on cases without needing to involve intrusive measures. A Threat Incident Report does not have to be completed for worrisome behaviour.

D. PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH HIGH RISK BEHAVIOR

1. Definition

High risk behaviors include, but are not limited to the following:

- § Possession or use of weapons
- § Bomb threat
- § Vicious physical assault

- § Serious verbal/written threats to kill or injure others
- § Internet website threats to kill or injure others

Example: *At eight o'clock tomorrow morning, I intend to shoot the Principal. That=s when he is in the office by himself. I have a 9 mm. Believe me, I know what I am doing. I am sick and tired of the way he runs this school.*

This threat is direct, specific as to the victim, motivation, weapon, place, time, and indicates that the threatmaker knows his targets schedule and has made preparations to act on the threat.

2. Reporting

Any person having knowledge of high-risk behavior or having reasonable grounds to believe there is a potential for high-risk behavior shall promptly report the information to the school Principal. No action shall be taken against a person who makes the report unless the report is made maliciously and without reasonable grounds.

3. Student Age

- 3.1 In general, high risk behaviours involve students 12 years of age or older who are believed to have contravened Section 264.1(1) of the *Criminal Code of Canada* which states that a student **who in any manner, knowingly utters, conveys or causes any person to receive a threat. . . to cause death or bodily harm** has committed an offense.

For students under the age of 12 who engage in threat-related behaviours, police involvement may provide a teachable moment for the child. Generally speaking, most threat-related behaviour exhibited by elementary-aged students, unless a weapon is involved, would fall under the category of worrisome behaviour.

4. Procedures for Activating the Protocol

Staff, students, and parents shall be provided with information regarding this protocol. The behaviors identified in the above definition section would be considered serious under the Criminal Code of Canada. In cases where high risk behaviors are exhibited, the following plan shall be put into place.

- 4.1 The student exhibiting the behavior shall be escorted to a safe, supervised area. When this is not possible, the safety of other students and staff shall be ensured in accordance with the individual school safety protocol.

4.2 The school Principal shall contact the Critical Intervention Team Leader (CITL) to determine a course of action to deal with the threat. One or more members of the Threat Assessment Team may also be contacted by the Principal. The office of the Superintendent shall also be notified by the Principal. **When the protocol is activated, parents will be notified at the earliest opportunity by one of the Threat Assessment Team members.**

4.3 Categories of High Risk Behaviour

a) Imminent Risk

When the student poses imminent risk (i.e. they have a weapon or are physically acting out in a manner that jeopardizes immediate safety in the school), the police shall be responsible to determine, in consultation with the CITL, whether to arrest and charge the student under the Criminal Code/Young Offenders Act, or to transport to a physician for evaluation under the Mental Health Act. A Child Welfare Worker shall be called upon where the Child Welfare Act may be utilized to obtain a secure treatment order.

Prior to the student=s possible eventual return to school, the CITL, in consultation with the administration, parents, Community Mental Health, Child and Family Services, and police shall develop a plan for the student=s readmission to school.

b) Moderate Risk

The CITL and the police, if involved, shall determine a course of action. If there does not appear to be an imminent risk, the CITL shall proceed with an initial risk assessment. Arrangements can be made for a comprehensive mental health assessment. To ensure a safe and caring environment, the CITL, in consultation with the administration, parents, Community Mental Health, Child and Family Services, and police shall develop a plan for the student=s readmission to school. Results of the mental health evaluation will need to be released by the parents to the school prior to the student returning. Conditions for re-admission to school shall be formalized in a contract that shall be signed by the student, parents, and appropriate school division representatives. In the case of a special needs student, the classroom support teacher and the student services supervisor shall be involved in the short-term plans for any further interventions.

c) Low Risk

The CITL, in consultation with the administrator, parents, and appropriate others shall determine a course of action.

Note: New proposed categories of high risk behaviours include Immediate (replacing imminent), threat making behaviour (replacing moderate and low risk) and inclusion of an exceptional cases category which includes worrisome behaviour that due to contextual reasons increases concern of threat).

- 4.4 The CITL shall be responsible to ensure that the recipient(s)/victim(s) of the student threats or behaviors shall be assessed and services provided as necessary. As the threat may be directed toward one or two students, an entire class, or the school population in general, the circumstances will dictate how far reaching an intervention may be. The CITL and the school principal shall determine if crisis counseling or a crisis response team is needed to re-establish calm.
- 4.5 The school principal, with the assistance of the family school liaison counselor or school counselor, shall be responsible to complete the High Risk Threat Incident Report included in the appendix section. One copy of the report shall be kept on file at the school and a copy submitted to the Critical Intervention Team Leader and the Superintendent.
- 4.6 The Principal shall notify all school staff, within a reasonable time period, when the protocol has been activated as a result of high-risk student behavior.
- 4.7 Notwithstanding any consequences contained in this protocol, student conduct shall be dealt with according to school division procedure. Communication with parents or guardians is an essential component in dealing with student conduct as outlined in Administrative Procedure #350: Student Expectations and Discipline. In the event that the student is suspended or expelled as a result of high-risk behavior, school division procedure shall be followed.

5. Guidelines for Re-entry into School

- 5.1 When it is deemed that a student may pose a threat to others, they may be suspended from school until a more comprehensive assessment can be completed. The suspension letter should not include a specific number of days for the suspension, but state that the suspension will be in effect until the assessment is complete.
- 5.2 The Threat Assessment Team guides the process from initial assessment, to planning intervention, through decreased risk, to plans for re-entry into school where a suspension has occurred.
- 5.3 The process is best accomplished when the Threat Assessment Team outlines in writing the steps that the student, family, school and others need to follow to ensure that appropriate assessment occurs prior to re-entry into school.
- 5.4 Following completion of the assessment, the Threat Assessment Team members may work with the student and his/her parents (care givers) to develop a plan for re-entry that becomes a signed contract by all participants, including the student and parents, if circumstances warrant.
- 5.5 If re-entry to school is not the recommended course of action, the Principal shall refer the student to the Livingstone Range School Division Discipline Committee to determine an alternate school placement or expulsion.

E. CHECKLIST AND QUESTIONS FOR RISK/THREAT ASSESSMENT

Answer the following questions as they relate to your own situation.

Checklist for Risk/Threat Assessment		Yes	No
1.	Have you assessed whether students and school staff feel safe from threats?		
2.	Do students and staff know how to recognize a risk/threat?		
3.	Do students and staff know who to tell if they recognize a risk/threat?		
4.	Does the person who is told about a risk/threat have a process to keep the student who has threatened to harm him/herself or others safe and away from other students?		
5.	Is the student excluded from school until the risk/threat is assessed?		
6.	Does the person who is told about a risk/threat have a team to work with?		
7.	Does your team have a leader?		
8.	Does a member of your team have the authority to exclude a student from school?		
9.	Does a member of your team have the authority to determine if a threat-maker needs to be charged under the Criminal Code?		
10.	Does a member of your team have the authority to obtain a search warrant, if necessary, to determine means to carry out a threat?		
11.	Does a member of your team have the authority to assess physical and mental status and hospitalize the student for further assessment or the risk of communicable disease?		
12.	Does a member of your team have the authority to protect the safety of the child?		
13.	If you have students from a distinct culture in your school(s), do you have at least one member of that culture on your risk/threat assessment team?		
14.	Do your team members have defined roles and responsibilities?		
15.	Does your team use a risk/threat assessment tool or a standardized process to assess risk/threat?		
16.	Does your team determine the motivation, means, and intent of the threat-maker?		
17.	Does your team assess the level of risk of the threat?		
18.	Does your team develop an intervention plan to meet the needs of the student who has threatened to harm him/herself or others?		

19.	Does your team take into account the culture of the student who has threatened to harm himself/herself or others?		
20.	Does your team assess the impact to the victim?		
21.	Does your team prepare a risk/threat incident report?		
22.	Do relevant organizations (including your School Board) have policies and procedures that support risk/threat assessment?		
23.	Does your school or jurisdiction have a process to inform students and parents of School Board and other policies and procedures?		
24.	Does your school or jurisdiction have a way to educate students and school staff about what a risk/threat is and what to do if they become aware of a student threatening to harm himself/herself or others?		
25.	Do you debrief after each risk/threat assessment?		
26.	Do you have a definition for a successful risk/threat assessment process?		
27.	Do you measure the success of your risk/threat assessment process?		
28.	Based on the learnings from the evaluation of your risk/threat assessment process, do you revise your risk/threat assessment protocol?		

F. GENERAL THREAT ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The “Guiding Interview Questions” taken from the Safe School Initiative (Fein et al, 2002) shall form the framework for the gathering of information during the threat assessment [see handout section].

DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Divisional office is notified of all threat assessments and following the threat assessment a *Threat Incident Report* (outline of report is included in handout section) is completed and forwarded to the Superintendent's office, to the Associate Superintendent of Student Programs, and one copy is retained by the school. Policy determining where the information will be stored at the school and who has access to the information needs to be determined before implementing procedures.

AGENCY BOUNDARIES WITHIN THE LRSD

Regional Health Authorities (includes community mental health services)

Calgary Health Region (Figure 1)

The Calgary health region includes the city of Calgary and surrounding rural areas including the following LRSD communities:

- α Nanton
- α Stavely
- α Claresholm

Chinook Health Region (Figure 2)

The Chinook Health Region includes the following LRSD communities:

- α Granum (those residing south of HWY 519)
- α Fort Macleod
- α Pincher Creek
- α Lundbreck
- α Crowsnest Pass

Child and Family Services

Child and Family Services Authority Region One (Figure 3)

Region one includes the city of Lethbridge, surrounding rural areas, and includes the following communities located within the LRSd:

- α Granum (those residing south of HWY 519)
- α Fort Macleod
- α Pincher Creek
- α Lundbreck
- α Crowsnest Pass

Child and Family Services Authority Region Three

Region three includes the city of Calgary, surrounding rural areas, and includes the following communities located within the LRSd:

- α Nanton
- α Stavely
- α Claresholm

Peigan Children Services

The Peigan Nation provides child and family services for the Brocket area and surrounding reserve.

Blood Tribe Children Services

Blood Tribe Services provides child and family services on reserve under band authority.

Police Services

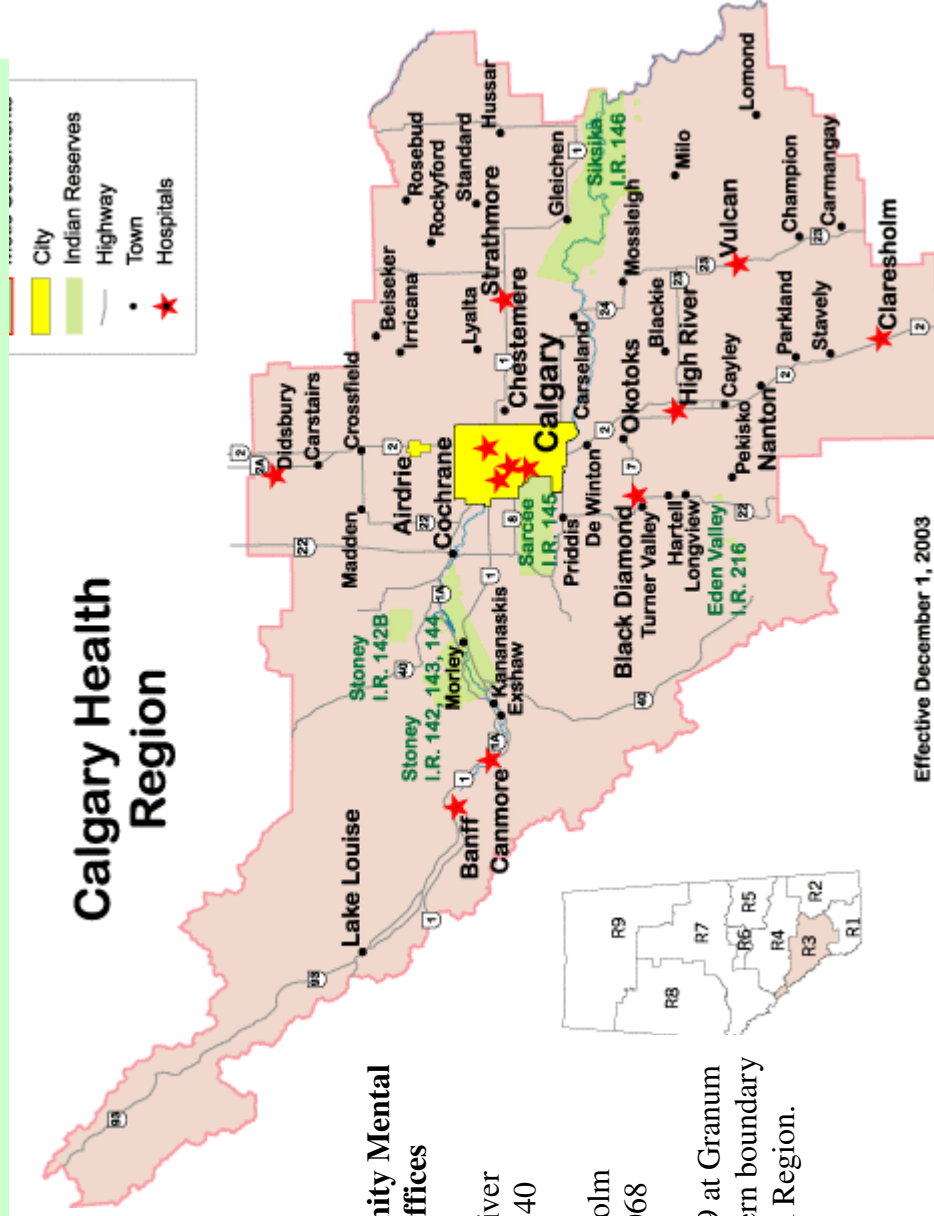
RCMP detachments are located in the towns of:

- α Nanton
- α Claresholm
- α Fort Macleod
- α Brocket
- α Pincher Creek

q Crowsnest Pass

Blood Tribe Police services the community of:
q Stand-off and surrounding Blood Reserve.

Figure 1: Calgary Health Region Service Area



Retrieved May 01/2005 from:
http://www.health.gov.ab.ca/regions/map_lookup.htm

Region 1
Southern Alberta
Child and Family
Services Authority



MAJOR COMMUNITIES

AETNA	COALHURST	FORT MACLEOD	LETHBRIDGE	PICTURE BUTTE	TABER
BARNWELL	COLEMAN	GLENWOOD	LUNDBRECK	PINCHER CREEK	TURN
BARONS	COUTTS	GRANUM	MAGRATH	PURPLE SPRINGS	TWIN BUT
BELLEVUE	COWLEY	GRASSY LAKE	MILK RIVER	RAYMOND	VALDAMALL
BLARMORE	CRANFORD	HAYS	MONARCH	SHAUGHNESSY	WARNER
BROCKET	DEL BONITA	HILL SPRING	MOUNTAIN VIEW	SPRING COULEE	WATERLOO
CARDSTON	DIAMOND CITY	HILLCREST MINES	NEW DAYTON	STAND OFF	WELLING
COALDALE	ERCHANHT	IRON SPRINGS	NOBLEFORD	STIRLING	WRENTHA

Figure 3: Children's Health Authority Region 1
 * Highway 519 at Granum marks northern boundary.
 Retrieved from http://www.child.gov.ab.ca/cfsa/pdf/ACS_CFSA_00.pdf

FRONT PAGE OF CRISIS RESPONSE FLIP CHART

2005-2006 LRSD CRISIS RESPONSE FLIPCHART
LRSD EMERGENCY NUMBERS
COMMUNICATION PROCEDURES
LOCK DOWN AND PROCEDURES
SCHOOL EVACUATION PROCEDURES
FIRE / BOMB THREATS
ARMED INTRUDERS
ABDUCTION / HOSTAGE TAKING
ASSAULT / INTRUDERS
ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD / LOSS OF UTILITIES
BUS ACCIDENT / EMERGENCY CLOSURE
TORNADO / EARTHQUAKE / SEVERE INJURY
THREAT ASSESSMENT PROTOCOLS THREAT CALL CHECKLIST

- Each page lifts with relevant information printed on back.
- The flipchart is printed each year in a different colour and distributed to all staff members and classrooms.
- Adapted from Medicine Hat Public/Grasslands School Divisions.

BACK PAGE OF CRISIS RESPONSE FLIP CHART

Stage One Team will determine whether to implement Stage Two Threat Assessment Protocols.

THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM	
Principal	Stage One/Two
Counsellor/FSL	Stage One/Two
RCMP	Stage One/Two
Mental Health	Stage Two
Children Services	Stage Two

PCRT activated by Assoc. Superintendent. Level of service determined by school, Divisional Safety Team , and PCRT.

POST-CRISIS RESPONSE TEAMS (PCRT)		
NORTH TEAM	School #	Home #
Counsellor		
Counsellor		
FSL		
FSL		
FSL		
N. Liaison		
WEST TEAM		
Counsellor		
Counsellor		
FSL		
FSL		
N. Liaison		

SUPPORT AGENCY RESOURCE LIST

RCMP	
Nanton	000-0000
Claresholm	
Fort Macleod	
Pincher Creek	
Crowsnest Pass	
Blood Tribe Police	

MENTAL HEALTH	
High River	
Claresholm	
Fort Macleod	
Pincher Creek	
Crowsnest Pass	

HEALTH REGIONS	
Calgary Health	
Chinook Health	

CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES	
High River	
Claresholm	
After Hours	
Lethbridge	
Crowsnest Pass	
After Hours	
Blood Children Services	



CHAPTER 3

ESTABLISHING A TEAM

RURAL REALITIES AND CREATING EFFECTIVE TATs

Providing multidisciplinary services within rural areas provides unique challenges to service providers. Considerations for leaders of implementation of threat assessment protocols and team developers include:

- Participation of management personnel from partner agencies during the creation of divisional threat assessment policy and protocols is essential.

Implications: Commitment to the concept of TAT's creates resource demands for participating agencies. Management involvement increases the ability of the agency to facilitate involvement.

- Threat making behaviours range in frequency and severity within school populations. Some schools might not experience a threat that results in complete multidisciplinary threat assessment within a school year while other schools may experience several.

Implications: If the Stage Two multidisciplinary team is not evoked during a school year, consider a mock call out to practice the protocols and to create an opportunity for team building.

- Many rural agencies run on skeleton staff, what happens when no-one is available to respond to a call out of the threat assessment team?

Implications: Schools need to be flexible when negotiating the TAT meeting date and time (better to wait a day for a meeting than to go ahead without the full team), agencies may consider making back-up arrangements with their next closest office to arrange cover-off services.

- ¶ Rural areas often possess some of the best communication technologies.
Implications: Utilize school division and health teleconferencing equipment to enable access to outside professionals or to enable 'virtual' participation by members unable to physically be present.
- ¶ Team members are often part of other multidisciplinary initiatives.
Implications: Consider timing of meetings, training, and debriefings, to facilitate other initiatives. Agencies may choose to have the same personnel attend all school related multidisciplinary initiatives to strengthen relationships and to create system expertise.
- ¶ Out of necessity many rural professionals develop a wide range of expertise to meet the diverse demands and skills necessary to function in a rural service area.
Implication: Take the time to investigate the special abilities, interest areas, and networking potentials of individual team members.
- ¶ One Alberta school division that has urban and rural schools has contracted out threat assessment services to rural mental health, for rural schools but still utilize a multidisciplinary team with mental health as facilitator of process.
Implications: Referral criteria needs to be communicated clearly to all school personnel to avoid under or over referrals. This model carries an uncertain cost (dependent upon the number of assessments) which could be problematic for divisions with smaller budgets. The model provides expertise to rural schools that lack counselling personnel and decreases training costs.

ASSESSING COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

Before determining who to invite to participate on your multidisciplinary school threat assessment team, take the time to thoroughly assess the range of possible members. There is a wide variety in access to social service, health, and other professional personnel within rural school regions. Undertaking a community capacity assessment, reviewing past similar reviews, or community needs assessments may add unexpected potential allies in the search for TAT members.

The “Obvious Allies”

Local Police/RCMP

If your community is fortunate enough to have a local detachment of RCMP or local police force, this is a logical first place to start your search for team members. Inclusion of the police in the threat assessment process is a necessary component of the overall threat assessment strategy. Ultimately, it is the law enforcement personnel that decide whether a threat has met the standard of the Criminal Code of Canada and whether charges will be laid in specific cases.

Strengths

- Law enforcement personnel bring to the table an understanding of the law, the legal system, and information related to the severity of the crime within the norms of the community.
- Building relationships with police force within the context of threat assessment also opens the door for improved liaison over other police-school issues.
- Provides opportunity for police to demonstrate proactive community policing strategies.

- ☐ Enables police to have access to intelligence regarding threat making behaviours that may help to “complete the circle” in other violence matters (threats and violence occur more often outside of schools).
- ☐ Police may choose not to lay charges on initial information but should circumstances change, they have been aware and involved through the process.
- ☐ Collaboration between a multidisciplinary team may have the outcome of shifting the focus of resources from punishment to rehabilitation and support.

School Resource Officers

School resource officers (SRO) used to be a city phenomenon but more rural school divisions are accessing the involvement of these highly specialized personnel. Within the LRSD some RCMP detachments have assigned officers to specific schools. The officers make a point of dropping in, attending school events, and responding to staff and student requests.

Strengths

- ☐ Understanding the school culture, administration, staff, and students.
- ☐ Knowledge of case law as it pertains to schools.
- ☐ By virtue of selection for the position, generally have a belief in the power of intervention and prevention versus punishment as a way to reduce violence.

Community Mental Health Therapists (Provincial)

In Alberta, mental health is included as part of the Regional Health Authority’s (RHA) domain. School divisions and RHA’s do not necessarily share co-terminous boundaries so discussions regarding involvement need to occur with each RHA and

in some cases, within sub-divisions of the RHA. Both the Calgary Health Region and the Chinook Health Region (Lethbridge) deliver services within the LRSD, however, methods of service delivery and programs vary. The Chinook Regional Health Authority has a rural community mental health team that works out of Fort Macleod. A child therapist from the Calgary Health Region's, High River Rural Community Health Clinic, provides services in the northern part of the LRSD.

Strengths

- Rural mental health therapists bring to the threat assessment team a wide range of skills and resources including: knowledge of programs and interventions offered throughout the health region for mental health services, clinical skills in risk assessment, base knowledge of child and adolescent development, violence prevention, and the other general mental health assessment skills.
- Rural mental health clinics have access to additional mental health specialists throughout the health region they are located within, and to provincial specialists.

Native Liaison Workers

Some schools have native liaison workers that provide counselling services, family support services, and crisis counselling services to First Nations students and families. Schools that have First Nations students but do not have native liaison workers need to ensure that someone on the team with multicultural counselling competencies participates on the team.

Strengths

- ☐ Bring cultural and contextual knowledge important to understanding the student's behaviours.
- ☐ Connected to First Nation service providers (through networking), have working knowledge of community systems, and established ties with the community.
- ☐ May have knowledge and access to traditional interventions or insight into appropriateness of recommended intervention and management plans.

Other Mental Health Professionals

Some communities may have access to private psychologists, counsellors, and clinical social workers that may be contracted by the school division to participate on the school threat assessment team. Some schools have students attending from a variety of other towns or reserves. Mental health service providers within those communities/reserves are also potential team resources.

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)

FCSS is a program funded through the Alberta Government and is found in many communities across the province. The training of personnel, and programs offered differ from community to community. In some areas, FCSS programs have hired counsellors in the capacity of family support workers, counsellors, and education providers.

Strengths

- ☐ They bring an understanding of family systems, community norms, community resources, and general liaison skills.

- q FCSS personnel may be able to provide information related to community needs and resources.

Other Health Professionals

Other health care professionals such as psychiatric nurses, nurses, doctors, psychiatrists, or forensic psychologists may be available through the health authority and possess a specialized interest or background in psychiatric care, adolescent development, suicide assessment and intervention or forensic care. Networking with mental health managers and hospital managers may result to additional suggestions of personnel that may be an asset to the team.

Threat Assessment Consultants

Some divisions have elected to hire consultant to assist with high profile threat assessment situations, when schools have complicated trauma histories, and when there is a lack of qualified experts within the local area.

RECRUITING TIPS

- q Use existing contacts to compile list of potential collaborating agencies
- q Review mission statements and overarching mandates to identify shared goals
- q Network and use your assets – strategically assign who extends the invitations to the table
- q Identify how their participation falls within a shared mandate
- q Anticipate barriers to participation and intervene proactively

TEAM MEMBER ROLES

It is important to clarify roles at the beginning of each threat assessment to ensure a common understanding of roles and responsibilities exists. Although the threat assessment policy manual provides a general outline of roles this may be altered depending on the skills, abilities, and availability of team members.

School Division/Central Office Team Leader

Some school divisions have a team leader assigned out of head office to lead the threat assessment team and in other divisions the central office team leader acts primarily as a consultant. Common roles include:

- ☐ acting as a resource and liaison for school staff
- ☐ coordinator of media releases
- ☐ resource contact for information related to divisional policy, the school act, or acquiring legal advice regarding dilemmas.
- ☐ may lead high profile assessments or assist with schools working through their first threat assessment.

Team Leader/Facilitator

The team leader is the coordinator of the threat assessment and typically is responsible for:

- ☐ calling and briefing team members, for booking the threat assessment date and location
- ☐ notifying divisional office of the proposed threat assessment
- ☐ contributing to the final threat assessment summary
- ☐ ensuring adequate flow of knowledge as appropriate for the situation

- ☐ monitors compliance with threat assessment recommendations.

Administrator

The school administrator is responsible for ensuring the safety of the schools and the students and staff within. The administrator is part of the stage one threat assessment team and is responsible for making final decisions based on the recommendations of the threat assessment team. The administrator may:

- ☐ interview students
- ☐ authorize searches of school lockers, school based electronic resources, and the person(s) making threats subject to divisional policies
- ☐ contact parents regarding threat assessment
- ☐ submit a final threat assessment summary to division office
- ☐ contact the school division office of any threat assessments conducted
- ☐ ensure fair warning letters and policies are communicated to students, parents, and staff.

Law Enforcement

Law enforcement officers consult with the school administration to determine role during a threat assessment. The consulting officer may:

- ☐ participate on stage one threat assessment team
- ☐ decide to charge the student under the criminal code (at which point the threat assessment becomes a police matter, and the police take over the investigation)
- ☐ provide legal knowledge
- ☐ investigate and interview the threat maker or collaterals.

Counsellor

The counsellor is part of the stage one threat assessment team and often:

- ☐ conducts interviews of the threat maker and other collaterals
- ☐ acts as team leader coordinating the threat assessment
- ☐ monitors the implementation of threat assessment recommendations
- ☐ provides counselling and intervention services to the threat maker or victims

Mental Health Therapist

The mental health therapist is part of the stage two multidisciplinary team (although sometimes is asked to assist with stage one assessments if school counsellor is unavailable). It is NOT the role of the mental health professional to conduct a full risk assessment as part of the team threat assessment (although in complicated cases the threat assessment team may recommend referral to mental health as part of the threat management plan. Primary role of the therapist is to:

- ☐ act as a consultant to the threat assessment team
- ☐ provide knowledge regarding child/adolescent development
- ☐ outline mental health services and resources available
- ☐ assist in identifying behaviours of concern

Child and Family Service Workers

Child and family service workers are part of the stage two multidisciplinary threat assessment team and provide expertise regarding:

- ☐ services and resources available through children services
- ☐ family violence

- q family dynamics, effects of exposure to violence, abuse, and neglect

Other Team Members

Other team members such as forensic psychologists, psychiatrist, threat assessment consultants, clergy, probation officers, school resource officers, Family and Community Support Workers, and staff members may be asked to participate on the team to provide specialized knowledge and to increase the capacity of the threat assessment team to design a responsive threat management plan. When inviting new members, particularly those who have not taken school threat assessment training it is important that the function of the team and process is clearly explained and expectations of the professional invited is stated clearly.

THREAT ASSESSMENT MEMBER QUALITIES

MEMBER	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGE	PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES
All	Communication Skills Threat Assessment Training Analytical Thinking Skills Problem Solving Skills	School Threat Assessment Policies Aware of own agency resources, protocols, and information sharing guidelines Knowledge of child and adolescent behaviour	Open Minded Team Player Flexible High Ethical Standards Respect for all disciplines Creative
Administrators	Decision-making Leading	School Act Divisional Policy Discipline Policy	Open to collaboration
School Counsellors/	Networking	School Resources	Same as above

FSL Counsellors	Interview Skills	School System Dynamics Staff and student needs	
Mental Health Therapists	Interview Skills	Risk assessment Mental health assessment and treatment	Same as above
Police Officers/ School Resource Officers	Investigation	Criminal Code Legal System Young Offenders Act	Same as above
Child and Family Service Workers	Family Assessment	Child and Family Services Act	Same as above

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS: PLANNING SUCCESS

- ☐ Collaborate with agencies in the creation of threat assessment policies.
- ☐ Involve management and front line staff in policy making discussions.
- ☐ Clearly state and communicate threat assessment protocols and policies of the Division.
- ☐ Identify clear roles and responsibilities for individual members based on agency and skills. Establish responsibilities and accountability procedures and guidelines.
- ☐ Strong leadership and a multi-agency steering or management group.
- ☐ Collaborative timetable for implementation of changes and incremental approach to change. Link threat assessment processes to crisis response and overall Divisional safety plans.
- ☐ Create clear channels of communication at all levels; negotiate guidelines for information sharing and adequate information technology systems.

(Adapted from Sloper, 2004).

IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- ☐ Ensure adequate time and resources to complete required threat assessment tasks.
- ☐ Recruit members with the “right” background for the team.
- ☐ Plan joint training opportunities.
- ☐ Provide supports and supervision, particularly during first threat assessments.
- ☐ Evaluate outcomes and debrief individual threat assessments.

- Schedule annual multidisciplinary policy review meetings.

(Adapted from Sloper, 2004).

ADDITIONAL BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

In addition to considering the obvious ‘opposites’ of factors leading to success discussed on the previous page, five other factors have the potential to negatively impact the formation of effective multidisciplinary teams:

- Constant reorganization of policies and protocols
- Frequent staff turnover
- Lack of qualified staff
- Financial uncertainty
- Differing ideologies/agency cultures
- Lack of co-terminous boundaries of agencies.

(Adapted from Sloper, 2004).

Financial Considerations of Implementing School Threat Assessment Teams

Implementing a multidisciplinary threat assessment team involves costs to both the school division and partner agencies. Significant costs including threat assessment training for team members and release time to participate in the threat assessments for all participants. Suggestions to reduce costs include:

- Facilitating select team members to receive “trainer” status so that ongoing training needs can be met locally with minimal costs (e.g. training manual).

- Combining training sessions and recruitment efforts with other ongoing initiatives such as crisis response teams and interdisciplinary integrated service programs.
- Appeal to the potential long term savings to individual agencies by identifying the costs of not responding to threats (police complaints, referrals for risk assessment, child welfare referrals).
- Investigate provincial and federal grants available (e.g. Family Violence and Bullying grant) .
- Facilitate discussion of regional collaboration to provide more efficient services (e.g. RCMP detachments pooling resources to allow for a regional school resource officer).
- Networking and effective communication to ensure that funding partners are aware of the benefits of implementing the threat assessment model.

TRAINING STANDARDS

Research identifies joint training as the biggest contributor to the development of cohesive multidisciplinary teams. Joint training:

- Ensures common understanding of policies, procedures, and terminology.
- Allows time to build relationships with team members from other team agencies.
- Demonstrates commitment to the initiative.

- ☐ Creates a context to explore the strengths, knowledge, and skills of the team.
- ☐ Provides opportunities to apply the threat assessment to hypothetical case studies.

LRSD TRAINING PLAN

School Administrators:

Level One Threat Assessment Training

School Counsellors:

Level One Threat Assessment Training

Level Two Threat Assessment Training: The Strategic Interview

Family School Liaison Counsellors:

Level One Threat Assessment Training

Level Two Threat Assessment Training: The Strategic Interview

Train-the Trainer Level One Certification (2 FSLC Counsellors)

Non-school Team Members:

Invited and encouraged to attend Level One Training

NOTE:

- ☐ Some schools and school divisions in Canada have elected to train all staff members in Level One Threat Assessment.
- ☐ Consideration should be given to training learning support teachers (special education teachers), teacher assistants working with high risk youth, and alternative program teachers that work with at-risk youth.

MEETING GUIDELINES FOR TRAINING PURPOSES

Common training is a characteristic of effective multidisciplinary teams. In the LRSD provisions have been made for two FSLC's and the division office threat assessment team leader to complete the certification required to offer Level One Threat Assessment Training within the LRSD. The long term plan is to offer threat assessment team training on a yearly basis to ensure access of training to new staff, new agency partners, and interested staff. General guidelines for any training meetings or policy review meetings include:

- ☐ Demonstrate respect for the time and expertise of the participants.
- ☐ Set clear timelines and adhere to start and end times.
- ☐ Purposefully encourage multidisciplinary groupings.

EVALUATING TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Debriefing after the Event

After each threat assessment it is recommended that the team set a date to debrief the process to determine if the policies and procedures support the threat assessment process and to assess whether any changes to the process is warranted. See sample team debriefing agenda in chapter five. The debriefing also allows the team to be kept informed of the success and implementation of interventions. The date of the meeting should be set at the first threat assessment and interval dependent on the type of interventions requested (days to weeks).

Annual Review of Policy and Procedures

Consider including the annual threat assessment policy review as part of the overall annual divisional safety review. Often threat assessment team members and post-crisis response teams are comprised of the same people and creating one event to gather feedback to assess the overall safety policies of the division helps to keep the focus on the overall goal of integrating community resources to ensure the highest standard of service to our communities.

Creating one common review event could have several benefits including:

- ☐ Opportunity for continued collaboration of team members and leadership
- ☐ Reduce meeting time for participants
- ☐ Help to identify how individual programs are part of a larger safety plan
- ☐ Provide opportunity for agencies to bring forward any changes in their organizations or services that may impact schools

Program reviews are essential to the creation of effective supported services.

Providing designated debriefing opportunities and policy review meetings allow front-line team members and management to identify concerns with the program, and to pro-actively work on solutions to barriers. If evaluation processes are not in place and problems arise the system risks agencies withdrawing services, less collaborative or fractured teams, and in some cases funding withheld. Multi-agency programs need to demonstrate that the pooling of resources is meeting the intended need in a reasonably efficient manner.

TEAM MEETING DATA REVIEW QUESTIONS

To assess the potential threat posed by an individual or group requires gathering as much valid, reliable, and confirmed information as possible. Evaluation of both the threat and threat maker must occur to better assess the probability of the specific threat being carried out. Questions to guide this process were made available in the companion report to the Safe School Initiative Final Report (Vossekuil et al., 2002) titled “Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates” (Fein et al., 2002).

1. What are the student’s motive(s) and goals?
2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?
3. Has the student shown inappropriate interest in school attacks, attackers, weapons, or incidents of mass violence?
4. Has the student engaged in attack related behaviours?
5. Does the student have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?
6. Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation, (humiliation), or despair?
7. Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?
8. Does the student see violence as acceptable or desirable or the only way to solve problems?
9. Is the student’s conversation and “story” consistent with his or her actions?
10. Are other people concerned about the student’s potential for violence?
11. What circumstances might *affect* <increase or decrease> the likelihood of an attack?

ETHICAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical and Professional Responsibilities

Team members depending upon agency and profession, act under the guidelines of several different professional acts that set ethical standards for conduct including: the Alberta Teacher's Association, Alberta College of Social Workers, Canadian Counselling Association, College of Alberta Psychologists (see resource section for links to documents).

Team members are required to adhere to the standards set under provincial legislation such as the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPP), the Health Information Act (HIA), the Child, Youth, and Family Protection Act (replaced by Child Welfare Act), the Alberta School Act, and the Federal Canadian Criminal Code. Although, it might appear daunting to embark on a multi-agency initiative considering the restrictions of the aforementioned acts, there is also legislation and processes in place to facilitate the sharing of information. Exceptions: RCMP is not governed by FOIPP or the HIA, some direct and contract services offered by First Nations are not governed by FOIPP, and AADAC, although subject to FOIPP, is also governed by legislation restricting disclosure of personal information without consent (ACYI, 2003).

The cross-ministry information sharing committee established by the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative (ACYI) (Government of Alberta, 2003) facilitated discussions between ministries, boards and agencies, and HIA privacy staff barriers to set guidelines for information sharing among government ministries and agencies

regarding children and youth. Several information tools are available from ACYI that outline information sharing guidelines and contexts for applications:

[Information Sharing Guideline](#) This document prepared by the Information Sharing Working Committee: ACYI outlines the method by which information can be shared between service providers who are providing services and supports to the same child, youth and family.

The purpose of the Guideline is to:

- ☐ *Enable the sharing of necessary information about children and youth among service providers, and minimize barriers, perceived or real;*
- ☐ *Support an integrated approach to service delivery, by strengthening the ability to share required information about children and youth, based on consent;*
- ☐ *Enable effective coordination of supports and services by service providers, including the ability to collectively plan short and long term interventions;*
- ☐ *Provide a foundation for the sharing of information among government ministries and agencies in the best interest of children and youth.*

Links to the documents produced by ACYI can be found in the resources section of the training manual.

Several common factors underlie the decision to share information during a multidisciplinary threat assessment. Professionals are ethically obliged to share information if reasonable concerns exist that a child may be at imminent risk to harm

self or others. When a target has been identified and it is determined that the threat maker *poses* a risk to a specific target(s) then professionals also have a duty to warn the person at risk. However, situations may arise where it is not clear whether the standard of imminent risk has been met. Before deciding to share, ACYI suggests that professionals think about what information is needed to know or disclose to best serve the child. The second step is to consult the dilemma with other professionals on the threat assessment team (demonstrating desire for on-going communication, patience, and trust), and work through the ethical decision making process of your professional body (see sample ethical decision making model in handout section).

The divisional threat assessment team coordinator needs to keep informed of any changes to the Alberta School Act, Federal Youth Criminal Justice Act (replaced Young Offenders Act), Alberta Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act (replaced Child Welfare Act), and the Canadian Criminal Code that may affect the ability of the threat assessment team to share information.

One resource that may help Alberta school divisions to keep informed of case law that affects secondary schools is the journal (also available on-line) is *The Education Law Reporter* (<http://www.edlawcanada.com>).

Ethical Use of Information and Documentation

Individual members of the threat assessment team are guided by professional codes of conduct and agency standards for release of information. Another issue that needs to be discussed and agreed upon by the team involves recording keeping practices to be employed and information access. When interviewing threat assessment team members across the LRSD it became evident that different

practices existed both within and across agencies. The information provided during a threat assessment is for the sole purpose of assessing the severity of a specific threat within a specific context and creating effective intervention and management plans. Some teams present summary information in written form during the assessment to disseminate known facts to all team members and at the conclusion of the meeting the handouts are retained by the school as they were not intended to become part of any other file that other agencies may have on the child. It would be prudent for the team to discuss what agency requirements exist for documentation before commencing with the assessment. The LRSD policy manual specifies that a copy of the summary report is maintained at the school but does not designate where the report is kept or who has access to the information it contains.



CHAPTER 4

RESOURCES

RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Structured risk assessments are commonly completed by psychiatrists, psychologists, or other mental health professionals that have received specialized training. Risk assessments are conducted for a variety of reasons including emergency mental health assessment, civil cases, forensic evaluations for court purposes, or for correctional services (Bloom, Webster, Hucker, & Freitas, 2005). Bloom and colleagues suggested that the following general principles apply to conducting risk assessments in Canada:

- ☐ Assessments must be completed within legal and professional standards and “duty to protect” standards followed as required.
- ☐ A thorough risk assessment involves judicious review of all available historical data.
- ☐ Judgments or predictions must be clearly stated and specific to the current reason for risk assessment with relevant qualifiers such as type of violence that may occur, contextual factors that may increase risk, and time period for that the assessment is expected to cover.
- ☐ Professional standards require *completeness, thoroughness, accuracy, objectivity* and as needed, *second opinions* (p.7).
- ☐ Key risk factors and relevant combinations of risk factors need to be identified as well as interventions likely to reduce risk.

The following risk assessment tools are outside of the scope of what would be completed in a school based threat assessment. In some rare events previous risk assessments may be provided as part of the history taking process or the team may

make a recommendation that a formal risk assessment be conducted by qualified professionals. The brief description of risk assessment tools listed below is to provide introductory knowledge of commonly used structured risk assessment tools.

Historical/Clinical/Risk/Management 20 (HCR-20)

The HCR-20 (Webster, Douglas, Eaves, & Hart, 1997) structured clinical risk assessment tool (and those that were to follow) evolved in response to demands of the courts that evaluators base their recommendations on processes that are transparent, based on research, and able to bear legal scrutiny (Bloom et al., 2005). The HCR-20 is composed of twenty items, 10 static (historical factors unlikely to change), five items to assess *insightfulness, severity of psychiatric symptoms, impulsivity, treatability, and attitudinal issues* (Bloom et al., 2005, p. 7). The final five items focus on the future and expected capacity of the individual to follow a treatment plan, access to a support network, anxiety/stress management skills, and ability to resist external destabilizing factors. This tool is designed for adults but is included here because it evolved into similar structured risk assessments for children (EARLs) and youth (SAVRY).

Earl-20B and Earl-21G

The EARL-20B (Augimeri, Koegl, Webster, & Levene, 2001) and EARL-21G (Levene, Augimeri, Pepler, Walsh, Webster, & Koegel, 2001) are structured clinical risk assessment tools that evaluate known risk factors for violence and anti-social behaviour. They were designed to be used with children under the age of 12 (primarily 6-11 years of age) to predict risk for future anti-social behaviour and to provide data to be used for intervention planning and management. The EARL-20B

(Augimeri et al.) consists of 20 questions designed to assess boys and the EARL-21G (Levene et al.) consists of 21 questions similar in topics but based on review of female child psychopathic literature. Each tool identifies family, child, and responsibility items that the clinician evaluates using a 3 point scale. Information for the assessment is gathered through file reviews, case conferences, family interviews, and includes a 15-30 minute assessment of the child.

The EARL-20B and EARL-21G are intended to be administered by clinicians and professionals working with children with high risk violent and anti-social behaviours. Training opportunities are available through the authors and the tools can be ordered through the Centre for Committing Offences at the Child Development Institute (www.childdevelop.ca).

Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY)

The SAVRY (Borum, Bartel, & Forth, 2002) was co-developed by Randy Borum, who was also influential in the development of the questions used in most threat assessment interviews (Borum, 2000). The SAVRY is a risk assessment tool similar in structure and function to the EARL assessments but is designed for youth. The SAVRY requires gathering information related to historical factors, social/contextual risk factors, individual/clinical risk factors, and protective factors. Each of the criteria (24 risk factors and 6 protective actors) are evaluated as low, moderate, high or extreme risk based on the information gained through file review, case consultation, and from an interview with the youth. Both the EARL and SAVRY also provide a place for the clinician to use clinical judgment in identifying criteria as critical items for consideration.

Psychopathy Check List – Youth Version (PCL-YV)

The PCL-YV (Forth, Kosson, & Hare, 2003) a structured clinical judgment tool was designed following the development of the adult Hare Psychopathy Check List (PCL) (Hare, 1991) and the Hare Psychopath Checklist: Screening Version (Hare, Cox, & Hare, 1995). Literature reveals a relationship between *psychopathy* and *violence, recidivism, substance abuse, personality disorders, and contextual performance deficits* (as cited in Kosson, Cyterski, Steuerwald, Neumann, & Walker-Matthews, 2002, p.97). The PCL-YV was designed and is used primarily with youth involved in the criminal justice system.

OTHER ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Originally, the manual was to include only an annotated list of risk assessment tools, but it became apparent that the results of other assessment tools were also being used as part of the initial data gathered during routine threat assessments. There are few students in the average school that have undergone a comprehensive violence risk assessment. Violence risk assessments are conducted more often within the forensic field or for other specific legal purposes. Due to the general nature of the assessment (predictions of future violence with unknown targets or timeframes), the results can not always be generalized to different environments with different contextual factors than were present for the original risk assessment. There are other assessment tools that are sometimes mentioned during the data gathering and discussion stage of the threat assessment and a brief description of each follow to provide team members that are unfamiliar with the tools with basic information regarding the purpose and potential use of the tool.

Behavioral Assessment System for Children (BASC)

The BASC is an assessment tool used in many school systems to identify behavioural and emotional patterns of concern (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2002). The BASC system uses rating scales completed by parents, teachers, a self-report completed by the student of concern, structured observations, and a structured developmental history to identify areas of concerns and appropriate intervention plans. In some cases, BASC reports may contain information relevant to determining a student's baseline norm for of functioning and assist in gathering data related to psychosocial functioning.

Conners' Rating Scales

Conners' Rating Scales (Conners, 1997) were created to compare problem behaviours of students as reported by parents, teachers, and the student against normative behaviours of children and adolescents age three to seventeen. The scales are used to assess for attention-deficit/hyperactivity in children and adolescents.

RESOURCES FOR MULTIDISCIPLINARY THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS

Internet accessible documents are [underlined](#) and can be retrieved by holding down the control button (ctrl) and clicking on the title.

INFORMATION SHARING – ALBERTA CHILDREN AND YOUTH INITIATIVE

☞ [**Information Sharing Guideline**](#)

Complete information sharing report completed by the Information Sharing and Working Committee, April, 2003 (48 pages).

☞ [**Information Sharing Overview for Children and Youth in Alberta**](#)

Provides a quick "**green light**", "**yellow light**", and "**red light**" summary of information that can be shared between providers, information that may be shared with caution and information that cannot be shared. Recommend that team members print a copy to keep with the training manual.

☞ [**Information Sharing "Together for our Children"**](#)

General fact sheet summarizing the background, vision, and purpose of establishing guidelines for information sharing.

☞ [**The Use of Consent**](#)

Provides answers to frequently asked questions.

☞ [**Sample Terms of Reference - Integrated Service and Consent to**](#)

[**Disclosure Form**](#)

How to form for organizations planning to collaborate to create integrated service programs.

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR THREAT ASSESSMENT AND TRAUMA RESPONSE

<http://www.cameron-otto.com>

- q Links to articles written by Kevin Cameron and colleagues
- q Threat Assessment Training Information (Level One, Level Two, and Train-the-Trainer Workshops).
- q Conference Postings

NATIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER (NTAC) US SECRET SERVICE

<http://www.ustreas.gov/usss/index.shtml>

- q Links to Secret Service Threat Assessment Reports and Publications
- q **Final Report and Findings:**
Safe School Initiative Final Report: Implications for Prevention of School Attacks in the United States
- q **Threat Assessment in Schools:**
Companion Report to the SSI Final Report: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates
- q **Evaluating Risk for Targeted Violence in Schools**
Provides comparison of risk assessment and threat assessment approaches.
- q Protective Intelligence & Threat Assessment Investigations: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement Officials

http://ustreas.gov/usss/ntac/ntac_pi_guide_state.pdf

NASP: NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

<http://nasponline.org>

- q Links to handouts for parents and professionals related to school violence and crisis response
- q Guidelines for Responsible Media Coverage of School Crisis
This two page handout provides tips and dangers to coverage of school crises.
- q Threat Assessment at School: A Primer for Educators
Four page handout using FBI threat assessment model.
- q Links to chapters from the book *Best Practices in School Crisis Prevention and Intervention* (Lazarus, Jimerson, & Brock, 2002).
- q Highly recommend Chapter 13: Identifying Troubled Youth. Link to chapter: http://www.nasponline.org/crisisresources/troubyouth_eds.pdf

**FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

<http://www.fbi.gov>

- q The School Shooter
<http://www.fbi.gov/publications/school/school2.pdf>
- q A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety
<http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm>
- q Law Enforcement Intelligence Guide Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (US Department of Justice)
<http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/doj/lei/index.html>
- q Intelligence Requirements and Threat Assessment (Chapter 10 of Law Enforcement Intelligence Guide (US Department of Justice_)
<http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/doj/lei/chap10.pdf>

SAFE SCHOOL / ANTI-BULLYING RESOURCES

Bullying Roundtable Conference Proceedings

<http://www.familyviolenceroundtable.gov.ab.ca/>

Canadian Public Health Association and National Crime Prevention Strategy

- ☐ [CPHA Safe School Study](#)
- ☐ [Bullying, School Exclusion And Literacy](#)
- ☐ [Assessment Toolkit for Bullying, Harassment, and Peer Relations at School \(pdf\)](#)

SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCES

(Alberta) Centre for Suicide Prevention (SIEC)

<http://www.suicideinfo.ca>

The Centre for Suicide Prevention has three main branches:

- ☐ Information library and resource centre
- ☐ Suicide Prevention Training Programs
- ☐ Suicide Prevention Research Projects
- ☐ Location – Calgary, AB
- ☐ Site contains links to crisis centres across Canada
<http://www.suicideinfo.ca/csp/go.aspx?tabid=77>

American Association for Suicidology

<http://www.suicidology.org/index.cfm>

- ☐ Education and resource centre
- ☐ Contains links to fact sheets

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma: Recommended Solutions for Anti-Violence Workers

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-cn>

CODES OF ETHICS / CASE LAW

Alberta Teacher's Association Code of Professional Conduct

<http://www.teachers.ab.ca/Teaching+in+Alberta/Professional+Conduct/Code+of+Professional+Conduct.htm>

Canadian Psychologists Association Code of Ethics

<http://www.cpa.ca/ethics2000.html>

Canadian Counselling Association Code of Ethics

<http://www.ccacc.ca/coe.htm>

Alberta College of Social Workers Code of Ethics

<http://www.acsw.ab.ca/regulation/code>

RCMP

☐ Ethics and Integrity Statement

http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/about/ethics_e.htm

☐ Sections of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* of Special Interest to Law Enforcement and Educators

http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ycja/sections_e.htm

The Education Law Reporter

(<http://www.edlawcanada.com>)

☐ This journal is available through mail or on-line subscription and publishes articles and summaries of judicial decisions affecting schools.

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Canadian Counselling Association

Process of Ethical Decision-Making

- Step One:** Identify the key ethical issues related to this situation?
- Step Two:** What ethical guidelines are relevant to this situation?
- Step Three:** What ethical principles are of major importance in this situation?
- Step Four:** Identify the most significant principles, and the risks and benefits of acting on each.

The fourth step consists of choosing the most important principles and relevant ethical articles and beginning to implement some possible action by:

- (a) generating alternatives and examining the risks and benefits of each,*
- (b) securing additional information, including possible discussion with the client*
- (c) consulting with knowledgeable colleagues, with provincial or CCA ethics committees, or with other appropriate sources, and*
- (d) examining the probable outcomes of various courses of action.*

- Step Five:** Consider whether having more time to consider your decision will impact your choice of action.
- Step Six:** What is the best action plan for this particular situation?

Adapted from CCA Code of Ethics

<http://www.ccacc.ca/coe.htm>

Note: The Canadian Psychologists Association's Code of Ethics also includes a 10-Step Decision Making Model for resolving Ethical Dilemmas.

<http://www.cpa.ca/ethics2000.html>



CHAPTER 5

HANDOUTS

**KEY DEVELOPMENTS OF THREAT ASSESSMENT PROTOCOLS
CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES**

DATE	INITIATIVE	AGENCY	RELEVANCE
1992	Exceptional Case Studies Project	Secret Service US Dept. of Justice	Study of behaviour of individuals who have carried out or attempted attacks on public officials.
1994	Goals 2000: Educate America Act	Federal Legislation	Established national educational goals including requiring schools to be violence and gun free by year 2000.
1994	Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act(Section 7 of the Educate America Act)	Federal Legislation	Called for assessment of objective data of types and incidents of violence and drug use in schools. Influenced educators to identify ways to identify and intervene with students at risk of violent behaviour.
1997	Taber School Crisis Response Protocols	Taber Suicide Intervention Committee	Committee began process to create formal protocols for crisis response in schools. Resulted in formation of adjunct committee, Taber Response Team.
1997	In-service for Taber Schools administration and selected staff.	Taber Crisis Response Team	Participants exposed to crisis response model and demonstrations of crisis response scenarios.
1997-1998	Report on State of Implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act	US Government	To get Federal funding for education state must enact legislation requiring one year expulsion for students that bring fire-arms to school.
1997-1998	Task Force on School Violence	Dallas Independent School District	Created risk assessment tool and completed study over one year of implementation.
1998	National Threat Assessment Center	Secret Service	National Threat Assessment Center created enabling access to research on threat assessment.
1998	NCAVC	FBI National Center	Completed review of 18 recent

	School Shooting Study	for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC)	school shootings.
1998	Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools	US Dept. of Education US Dept. of Justice	Guide intended for schools to respond to threats and acts of violence.
1999 January	State of New York Task Force on School Violence Established	State of New York	Initiated Project S.A.V.E. Conducted surveys, interviews and public meetings to gather information about state of violence in schools in New York state.
1999 April 20 th	Columbine Shooting	Littleton, Colorado	13 victims killed.
1999 April 28 th	Taber Shooting	Taber, Alberta	Two assailants dead by suicide. One student killed.
1999 May	Premier's Task Force on Children at Risk	Government of Alberta	Established to examine issues facing children at risk including those at risk of developing violent behaviour.
1999 May	Taber Response Project	Government of Alberta Sun Country Child and Family Services Authority	Established to review the events of the Taber shooting, to determine the impact of the event and to make recommendations about how to prevent and respond to crisis events.
1999 May	NCAVC Leesburg Symposium	FBI (National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime)	Symposium on school shootings including individuals from schools that participated in school shooting study.
1999 June	Safe School Initiative launched.	US Secret Service US Dept. of Education	Initiated comprehensive review of thirty seven incidents of targeted school violence from 1974-2000. Interim report released in 2000.
1999 Fall	Alberta Children's Forum	Government of Alberta Task Force on Children at Risk	Provincial Forum held with representatives from multiple agencies providing services for youth as well as parents and youth.

1999 October	Final Report of New York Task Force	State of New York	Two hundred and seventy page report released containing recommendations of ways to identify students at risk of preventing violence in schools. Recommendations included zero tolerance policies for violence, increased surveillance technology, and establishment of behavioural disciplinary policies. Proposed a threat assessment model to use in school settings.
2000 February	The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective	US FBI US Department of Justice	
2000	Report of the Task Force on Children at Risk	Government of Alberta	Recommendations for prevention of violence in children from birth to adulthood. Recommendations from the Taber Response Project including interim protocols for assessing and managing high risk student behaviours.
2001	Canadian Threat Assessment Training Board	Funded by Canadian Federal Justice Department and organized through Lethbridge Community College	Board received funding for collaborative threat assessment training project developed by Kevin Cameron and Superintendent Glenn Woods (Criminal Profiler, RCMP). Completed two day multidisciplinary threat assessment training beginning in the 2001-2002 school year. Models derived from primarily from FBI and Secret Service research.
2001	Canadian Council for Threat Assessment Training and Trauma Response	Federal “not-for-profit” corporation.	Non-regulatory body established to make available “recommended” standards and practices for professionals in threat assessment/trauma response fields. Dedicated to completing original research in field of threat assessment.
2002	Final Report of the Safe	US Secret Service US Dept. of	Review of data learned through case review of school shootings

2002	School Initiative Threat Assessment in Schools: Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates	Education US Secret Service US Dept. of Education	and implications for the prevention of school targeted violence. Recommendations for the implementation of processes to identify, assess, and manage students that may pose a threat of targeted school violence. Multidisciplinary assessments recommended.
2004	School-Based Risk Assessment (SBRA)	W. Halikias	Risk assessment process that includes referrals of all types of threats of severe violence, not only targeted violence. Unilateral assessment by professionals.

FBI FOUR-PRONG THREAT ASSESSMENT MODEL

- Dynamic assessment requiring the gathering of historical data from multiple sources as well as suggested interview questions.
- For each prong of the assessment model, specific traits, guidelines, examples, and signs to watch for are provided but readers are cautioned not to prematurely label a student based on information on only one prong, or by assuming behaviours as significant without establishing a baseline of behaviour.
- Traits identified for each prong may be due to other causes such as depression, substance abuse, or other mental health problems and if suspected, the student should be referred for an additional mental health assessment.

PRONG ONE: Personality Traits

- Personality traits and behaviours as potentially significant to indicating whether a student may pose a threat for violence including “leakage” (O’Toole, 2000, p.16) defined as the intentional or unintentional sharing of “feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, boasts, innuendoes, predictions, or ultimatums.” (p. 16).
- Twenty seven other traits are listed including low self-esteem, feelings of alienation, intolerance, anger management problems, tendency to externalize blame, and identification with negative role models.

PRONG TWO: Family Dynamics

- Family dynamics included as potential warning signs: conflicted relationship with parents, parental acceptance of pathological behaviour, easy access to weapons, lack of family intimacy, frequent or recent moves, few boundaries set by parent, and few limits or poor monitoring of TV or Internet.

PRONG THREE: School Dynamics

- Potentially concerning school dynamics include poor school attachment, school tolerance of disrespectful behaviours, perception of unjust discipline, static and inflexible culture, unequal recognition of student groups, unsupervised access to computers.
- Closed climate where students feel unsafe telling staff about concerns regarding student behaviours.

PRONG FOUR: Social Environment

- Social assessment of the student's environment should focus on particular interest in violent media, identification with peer groups espousing violence or extremist beliefs, patterns of drug and alcohol use, and potential susceptibility to copycat behaviours as a result of exposure to intense media coverage of violent incidents.

(Adapted from O'Toole, 2000)

KEY FINDINGS OF THE SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE

- ☐ Incidents of targeted violence at school *rarely* were sudden, impulsive acts.
- ☐ Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack.
- ☐ Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to the attack.
- ☐ There is no accurate or useful 'profile' of students who engage in targeted school violence.
- ☐ Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.
- ☐ Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.
- ☐ Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted or injured by others prior to the attack.
- ☐ Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
- ☐ In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
- ☐ Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications For the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States (Vossekuil et al., 2002, p.18)

TES STUDENT TYPOLOGIES

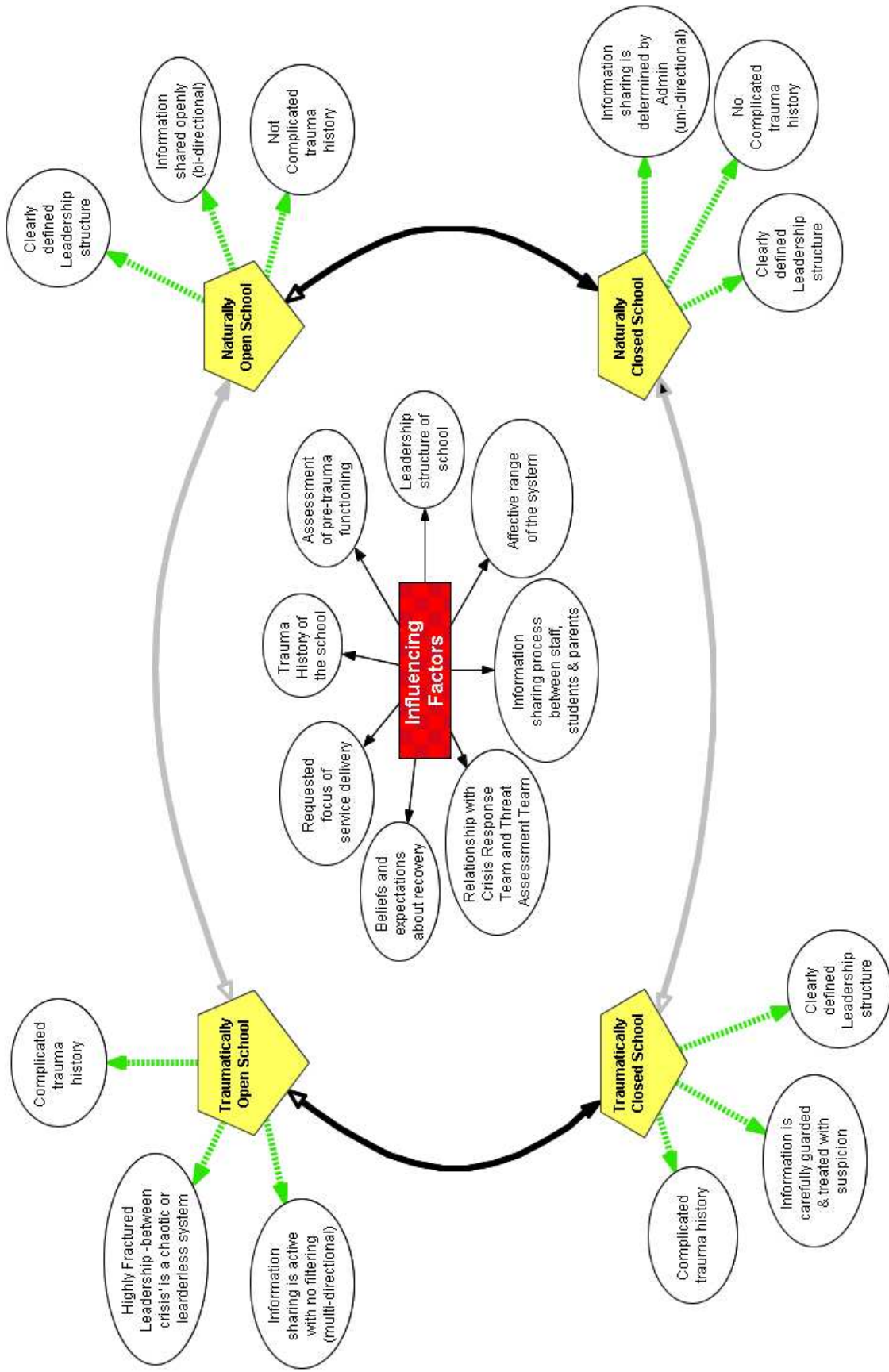
TYPOLOGY	CHARACTERISTICS	MOTIVATIONS & NEED FOR JUSTIFICATION
Traditional Behavioural Type	<p>Behaviours consistent with conduct disorder.</p> <p>Known to school or police for aggression.</p> <p>Utilizes instrumental violence.</p> <p>Can delay violence depending on context.</p> <p>Usually targets one person at a time unless they are part of a gang.</p> <p>Choose site of attack based on strategy and opportunity.</p>	<p>May have childhood trauma histories.</p> <p>Abuse (if applicable) contributes to justification for violence.</p> <p>Try to avoid being caught.</p> <p>Blame others for their circumstance.</p> <p>Blame society for failing them.</p>
Traditional Cognitive Type	<p>Behaviours usually observable only to targets.</p> <p>Often meet conduct disorder criteria but often not identified by school/ police due to deceptive skills.</p> <p>Capable of “splitting” groups after detection due to high levels of manipulative skill and charm.</p> <p>Primarily use instrumental violence.</p> <p>Usually select one target at a time unless part of a gang.</p> <p>May influence others to commit violent acts.</p> <p>Site chosen usually site of opportunity.</p>	<p>Believe their violent behaviours are justified.</p> <p>Do not want to be caught and can withhold acting violently to avoid consequences.</p> <p>May have histories of neglect but in most cases do not.</p>
Mixed	Act primarily out of affective	Often have histories of neglect,

	<p>domain.</p> <p>Highly emotional, prone to bursts of anger.</p> <p>Exhibit many characteristics of oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder.</p> <p>School and police often aware of youth due to past behaviour.</p> <p>Some may only express their aggression in home environment.</p> <p>Engage in affective violence and once activated quickly become “out of control” and unable to stop themselves during a violent episode.</p> <p>May chose one or multiple targets purposefully or emotionally based random targets ie. “the whole school”.</p> <p>Site selection may be based on emotional fusion to site.</p>	<p>abuse or exposure to violence.</p> <p>Intense beliefs of justification for violence at the time of the event.</p> <p>Intense feelings of guilt and remorse after event.</p> <p>Generally do not care if they are caught during the act.</p>
<p>Nontraditional I</p>	<p>Rarely have come to attention of school authorities or police.</p> <p>Engage exclusively in affective violence.</p> <p>Emotional pain results in an explosive violent act.</p> <p>May produce hit lists, violent web sites, or produce violent literature.</p> <p>Specific or random target selection.</p> <p>Site selection usually due to emotional fusion with site.</p>	<p>Often have trauma histories that were untreated.</p> <p>Abuse contributes to youth justification for violence.</p> <p>Work through justification process cognitively often through writings, drawings, stories, poems, and verbalizations.</p>

(Cameron & Woods, 2005, p. 79-86)

SCHOOL TYPOLOGIES

(adapted from Cameron & Woods, 2004)



SCHOOL CRISIS/TRAUMA EVENTS SUMMARY RECORD 2005-2006

DATE	EVENT	GRADE	CRISIS/ TRAUMA	IMPACT ZONE	CONTEXTUAL FACTORS
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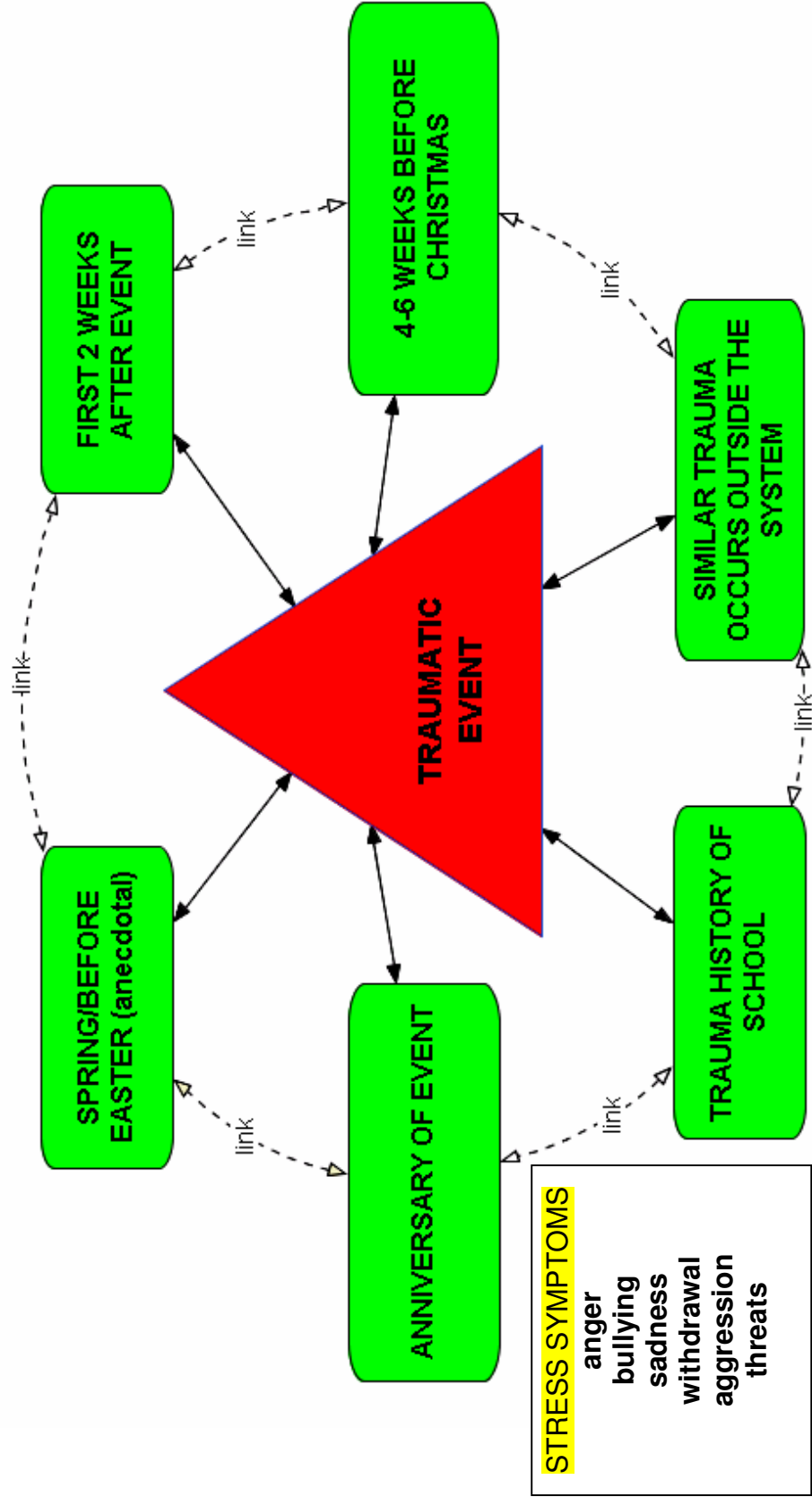
Event: Include brief descriptor of event ie. shooting, suicide, staff death, extended lock-down ect.
 Grades: Grade level(s) primarily affected.
 Impact Zone: Anticipated impact zone.
 Contextual Factors: Identify any local contextual information that might affect impact zone or complicate recovery of the system.
 Crisis/Trauma: Classify type of event.

DIVISIONAL CRISIS/TRAUMA SUMMARY RECORD 2005-2006

DATE	EVENT	SCHOOL/ GRADES	CRISIS/ TRAUMA	IMPACT ZONE	CONTEXTUAL FACTORS
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Event: Include brief descriptor of event (e.g. shooting, suicide, staff death, extended lock-down)
School/Grades: Identify school, community, and grade level(s) primarily affected.
Crisis/Trauma: Classify type of event.
Contextual Factors: Identify any local contextual information that might affect impact zone or complicate recovery of the system.

CRITICAL TIME PERIODS FOLLOWING A TRAUMATIC EVENT
(adapted from Cameron & Woods, 2005)



INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS
(Fein et al., 2002)

1. What are the student's motive(s) and goals?
2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?
3. Has the student shown inappropriate interest in school attacks, attackers, weapons, or incidents of mass violence?
4. Has the student engaged in attack related behaviours?
5. Does the student have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?
6. Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation, (humiliation), or despair?
7. Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?
8. Does the student see violence as acceptable or desirable or the only way to solve problems?
9. Is the student's conversation and "story" consistent with his or her actions?
10. Are other people concerned about the student's potential for violence?
11. What circumstances might *affect* <increase or decrease> the likelihood of an attack?

SAMPLE MULTIDISCIPLINARY THREAT ASSESSMENT MEETING AGENDA

1. Introduction of team members and agency.
2. Brief review of confidentiality and authority to act policies.
3. Opportunity to share any ethical conflicts specific to proceedings.
4. School summary of stage one threat assessment process and review of data.
5. Team sharing specific to case.
6. Discussion to establish whether information available is sufficient to determine severity of threat.
 - a. If sufficient information determine level of threat (worrisome behaviour, exceptional case, threat making behaviour) or
 - b. If insufficient information identify plan to acquire needed information, and continued plan to ensure safety of students and connection of threat making student to supports.
7. Recommendations for intervention.
8. Complete summary of final recommendations and suggested intervention or management plans.
9. Set follow-up date to review progress and to debrief threat assessment.

SAMPLE DEBRIEFING MEETING AGENDA

1. Summary of intervention and/or management progress by members involved.
2. Additional information from school regarding threat making student, victims, or school community in general.
3. Discussion regarding termination, continuation, or on-going monitoring of intervention/management plan.
4. Reflections on threat assessment process.
5. Recommendations for improvements or changes to threat assessment process.

THREAT ASSESSMENT INCIDENT REPORT

To be completed by Principal or designate.

Name of student: _____ School/Class: _____

Date of initial incident: _____

Nature of threat (check all that apply):

spoken written Electronic (e-mail, web, chat) gesture

Brief Description of threat: _____

Target(s) of threat: _____

Threat reported by: student staff parent other (identify)

Others involved in incident and nature of involvement (staff, students, others):

Parents/Guardian of Threat maker notified (date): _____

Parents/Guardian of Target notified: yes no (indicate why not)

Stage One Assessment:

Completed (date): _____ By: _____

Attach Guiding Interview Question Data

Results: referral to Stage Two Threat Assessment Team
 worrisome behaviour (attach school intervention plan)

Stage Two Threat Assessment:

Completed (date): _____

Participants:	NAME
School Administrator:	_____
School/FSL Counsellor:	_____
RCMP:	_____
Mental Health:	_____
Child & Family Services:	_____
Other:	_____

Recommendations: Attach or list below (include any conditions to remain or return to school)

Date of follow-up review: _____

QUOTABLE QUOTES

In rural areas it is the person that is seen first and the agency second...team members have to be able to build effective connections to partners.

It doesn't work if everyone comes to the table saying this isn't my mandate but rather this is what I can bring to the table.

Decisions have to truly be collaborative and involve everyone at the table ... not just leave one agency or person to handle the issue in isolation.

The threats have to be brought forward for the team to do its job.

We all can hide behind policies and titles... it is the attitude we bring that matters.



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