

Threat Assessment Procedure

When a threat is reported, the principal or assistant principal or designee, as the leader of the school-based threat assessment team (i.e., principal or assistant principal, school resource officer, school psychologist, school counselor) should follow this procedure to assess the seriousness of the student's threat based on "Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence" by Dewey Cornell and Peter Sheras (2006, Sopris West Educational Services)

A. Evaluate the threat.

The principal or designee investigates a reported threat by interviewing the student who made the threat and any witnesses to the threat and writing down the exact contents of the threat and statements made by each party. The principal or designee should consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the student's intentions.

B. Decide whether the threat is transient or substantive.

Transient threats are defined as statements that do not express a lasting intent to harm someone and the student has no substantive intention of carrying out the threat. *Substantive* threats are defined as statements that express a continuing intent to harm someone that extends beyond the immediate incident or argument when the threat was made. Also consider the student's age, credibility, and previous discipline history.

C. Respond to the transient threat.

Typical responses may include a reprimand, parent notification, or another disciplinary action based on the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline Guidelines. The student may be required to make amends, apologize, or provide an explanation that makes it clear that the threat is over. Transient threats, by definition, do not require protective action because there is no sustained intent to carry out the threat. If the threat is substantive or the meaning of the threat is not clear, continue to the next step.

D. Decide whether the substantive threat is serious or very serious.

A *serious* threat involves a threat to assault someone. A *very serious* threat involves the use of a weapon or is a threat to kill, rape, or inflict severe injury on someone.

E. Respond to a serious substantive threat.

Take immediate precautions to protect potential victims, including notifying the intended victim and the victim's parents/legal guardians. Typical immediate protective actions may include: cautioning the student who made the threat about the consequences of carrying it out; providing direct supervision so that the student cannot carry out the threat while at school. Notify the student's parents/legal guardians to assume

responsibility for supervising the student after he or she is returned to parental control. Consider involving the school resource officer or other law enforcement. Refer the student for counseling, dispute mediation, or another appropriate intervention. A mental health assessment by the school psychologist or other mental health professional may be considered (refer to 6 of this subsection for a brief description). The student making the threat will be disciplined in accordance with the Code of Student Conduct and the Discipline Guidelines.

F. Respond to a very serious substantive threat (conduct a safety evaluation).

The full threat assessment team should be involved in a very serious substantive threat. The term “very serious substantive threat” is reserved for only the most serious and dangerous threat situations. The team’s investigation of the threat is termed a “safety evaluation” that should identify and carry out any actions necessary to reduce the risk of violence and to gather information relevant to whether the student can return to school. Take immediate precautions to protect potential victims, including notifying the victim and the victim’s parents. Notify the student’s parents/legal guardians. Consult with the school resource officer or other law enforcement. A mental health assessment should be conducted by the school psychologist or other mental health professional to assess the student’s present mental state and determine whether there are urgent mental health needs that require immediate attention or if there are other treatment, referral, or support needs. Another purpose of the mental health assessment is to gather information on the student’s motives and intentions in making the threat, to understand why the threat was made and to identify relevant strategies and interventions that have the potential to reduce the risk of violence. Permission from the parent/legal guardian is not needed to begin this assessment because of the immediate need to determine the safety of the student or others, but the parent/legal guardian should be notified promptly. Permission from the parent/legal guardian should be obtained if further assessment is needed. The student should also be disciplined as appropriate according to the Code of Student Conduct and the Discipline Guidelines.

Legal Reference:

Code of Virginia § 22.1-79.4, as amended. Threat assessment teams and oversight committees.

Code of Virginia § 54-1-2400.1, as amended. Mental health service providers; duty to protect third parties; immunity.

City of Virginia Beach Ordinance #2674 adopted November 6, 2001 adding City Code Section 23.8.2 prohibiting certain uses of imitation infectious biological, toxic, or radioactive substances.

School Board Policy 6-75 Psychological Tests

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