CTC CONSORTIUM
TRAINING & CONSULTING

Threat Guide

Threat Guide

Types of Violence

AFFECTIVE VIOLENCE

- Emotional reaction
- Based on situations and environmental stress
- Driven by adrenaline
- Lacks forethought or planning
- Can Be seen in FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE

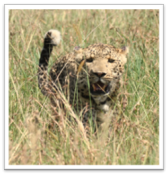
TARGETED VIOLENCE

- Non-emotional reaction
- Deliberate planning (weeks-months-years)
- Based in perceived/actual grievance
- Willing to sacrifice life for cause

Types of Threat

Howlers
Do not engage in approach behaviors and lack the intent to carry out their threats. When howlers threaten, their threats are TRANSIENT.

Hunters
Engage in serious targeted violence, and their intent is to complete the attack. They do not draw attention to themselves by making threats, so when hunters threaten, the threats are considered SUBSTANTIVE.



TRANSIENT THREATS
These types of threats to not express lasting intent to harm.

SUBSTANTIVE THREATS
These threats represent a continued attempt to harm someone.

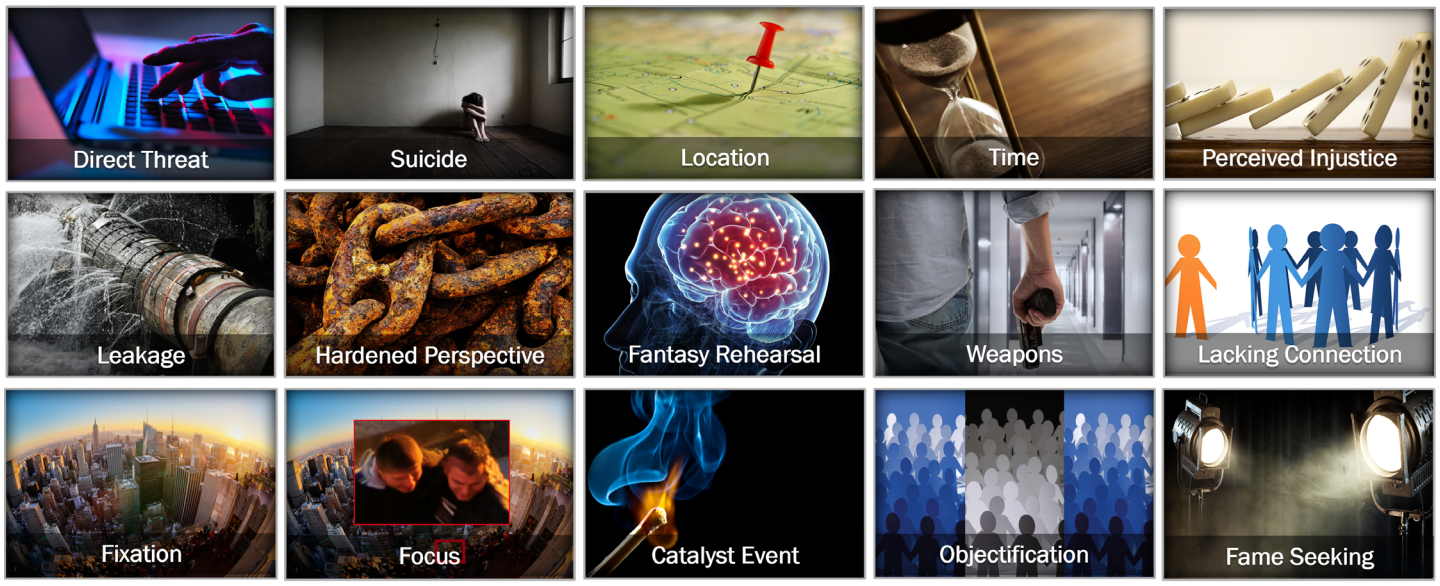
TYPE OF THREAT	EXAMPLE
Direct	“I’m going to blow up the library.”
Indirect/Vague	“Something bad is going to happen to the library.”
Direct w/action/time imperative	“I’m going to blow up the library Tuesday at 3.
Conditional ultimatum	“If you don’t give me a good grade, I’m going to blow up the library.”
Transient	Frustrated about an assignment, a student throws a book and yells, “Burn this down!”
Substantive	“I’m going to bring a nalgene bottle of gasoline to spread on these books and light it up.”
Howling	“You can’t treat me like this. I’m going to set fire to the world and roast marshmallows!”
Hunting	“I have what I need. I know what I’m going to do. #fire #library”
Vague but direct	“Something bad is happening in the library soon.”
Direct but vague	“They might want to invest in fire extinguishers around here.”

Risk Factors

Risk factors identify the personality traits, behavioral indicators, social and peer interactions, environmental stressors, threats, acquisition of or access to lethal means, and other contextual clues that have been noted in those who move forward with a targeted attack plan.

A key aspect of understanding risk factors is the importance of seeing these in combination, like puzzle pieces coming together to create a larger meaning. As with a puzzle, one piece alone is not particularly useful. It's when these pieces combine that the factors begin to be more useful in understanding risk.

When conducting a violence risk assessment (VRA), one should avoid emphasizing any single risk factor, such as weapons access or mental illness, without regard to the context of other risk factors.



Direct threat	Indirect threat	Lacks mental support	End of a relationship
Access to weapons	Lacks peer support	Explosive reactions	Inability to date
Hardened thoughts	Lacks family support	Intimidates others	Hopelessness
Social isolation	Loss of job	Lacks empathy	Last act behavior
Victim of bullying	Decline in academics	Polarized thoughts	Legacy token
Substance abuse	Acquiring weapons	Glorifies violence	Feels persecuted
Authority conflict	Suicide attempt	Lacks remorse	Leaks attack plan
Fixation on target	Focus on target	Action plan for attack	Time frame for attack
Fantasy rehearsal	Rejection	Financial loss	Catalyst event
Feels trapped	Poor anger outlets	Fame seeking	Objectification/ Depersonalization

Risk Factors for Targeted, Predatory, Mission-Oriented Violence

1. **Actionability** is the term used to describe if an individual has access to means and materials to carry out an attack. While firearms present a high level of concern, the VRA should determine if a potential attacker has access to any weapons, not just firearms.
2. A **hardened point of view** is a locked and fixed way of seeing the world that is resistant to other counterpoints. The individual holds a strong investment tied to these beliefs and they are often unwilling or unable to shift from these ideas.
3. **Drivenness and a justification for violent action** describe an attacker who is dedicated to committing violence in the name of a particular cause. As they escalate on the pathway to violence, they morally disengage from any external ethical or moral standards, objectify their target, and focus on mission completion.
4. **Grievance or injustice collection** takes on a dangerous characteristic where the grievance or injustice becomes a justification for violence. These grievances are most often held against those in positions of power. The attacker holds them responsible for real or imagined unfairness and difficulties.
5. Most attackers are **suicidal**. They express indifference toward life, hopelessness, and a lack of confidence about the future. They feel disempowered, misunderstood, and lost.
6. **Mental illness** can be an aggravating factor when conducted at VRA, particularly when related to thought disorders, depression, and bi-polar disorder. Most of those who carry out attacks experience psychological, behavioral, or developmental symptoms.
7. The **use of substances**, particularly stimulants, impacts decision making, increases isolation, fosters disengagement, and reduces impulse control. Drug or substance use, particularly methamphetamines or amphetamines, cocaine, or alcohol, has been connected to both affective and targeted violence.
8. Many who engage in targeted violence experience an inability to understand different perspectives. This **lack of empathy and remorse for actions** is an aggravating factor in a violence risk threat assessment.
9. When potential attackers experience frustrations, pain or feel overwhelmed, they engage in **fantasy rehearsals** to reduce their anxiety. These fantasies involve them confronting, punishing and/or destroying the target of their perceived injustices.
10. Feelings of **isolation and hopelessness** are common among those who plan targeted violence. They may experience a lack of social or advancement opportunities at home, school, or work. Most experience chronic isolation and/or an inability to create or maintain sexual or intimate relationships with others.
11. Many attackers have felt **marginalized** and expressed despair and hopelessness about a better tomorrow. This results in a perceived threat to those they identify with, causing a sense of moral outrage.

1. A **fascination with violence** is a risk factor that at least half of those experience while planning their attacks. When engaged in a VRA, there should be a careful exploration of the subject's investment, obsession, or fixation on violence. This could include studying past attacks, watching media that shows sensationalized violence against particular groups, drawing pictures or writing essays with similar themes.
2. The **desire for fame** is present as a motivating factor for this kind of targeted violence. Those who feel marginalized, bullied, teased, or isolated expressed a desire for attention and seek retribution for this perceived injustice.
3. As part of the escalation on the pathway, attackers often engage in **objectification and depersonalization** toward their target. They may use hostile language, insulting, images or diminishing/misogynistic objectification focused on separating themselves from their target.

Environmental Factors

1. **Catalyst events** occur when there is a significant loss that occurs in a person's life that causes an escalation in attacker planning. This could be anything the person holds dear in their life such as failing a particularly important class, losing a romantic relationship, being fired from a job, being involved in domestic abuse, drug use, or criminal charges, or the death of a close friend or family member.
2. The experience of **teasing and bullying** are additional escalating factors for the attacker. Bullying and teasing may be physical, social, property, or cyber. About 1/3 of attackers in their study engaged in bullying, often as part of a persistent pattern of behavior which lasted for weeks, months, or years.
3. **Free fall** describes a wide range of problems an attacker may experience in their community, school, work, primary support group, and/or social circle. For those in a free fall, there is little hope for improvement and this often leads to further isolation, suicidality and feelings of despair. As problems spiral (conflicts in the home, academic, legal or disciplinary actions, or other personal issues), there is little preventing them from looking for an escape.
4. When there is a rapid or intense **decrease in academic or work progress**, this can be a catalyst event and lead to further escalation. In many attack cases, the loss of academic or workplace connection becomes the final straw that overwhelms the individual and moves them closer to an attack. Failure to progress in work and school can directly contribute to other areas of life beginning to become unstable.
5. The **social isolation** that occurs when the person has vastly different beliefs from the majority and/or when they see increases in teasing and bullying, is another cause for escalation. This isolation makes the potential attacker feel alone in their thinking and that violence as the only way to be seen. This isolation is often observed by those around the attacker as they isolate themselves, withdrawing from others, appearing sad, or crying.

Protective Factors

Protective factors add stability and support to an individual's experience and create a defense against elements that may incite or motivate violence. When conducting a threat assessment, it is essential to balance risk factors against the protective factors that exist for an individual.

- **Individual Protective Factors**—*Individual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors*
- **Relationship Protective Factors**—*Social groups, peers, and family behaviors and influences*
- **Community Protective Factors**—*Characteristics and conditions of physical and social environment*
- **Societal**—*Social and cultural norms*

Social support	Empathy to others	School engagement	Religious supports
Family support	Perspective taking	Work engagement	Non-violent outlets
Positive future view	Intimate relationship	Positive self-esteem	Problem solving
No weapon access	Sense of identity	Consequence aware	Emotional stability
Social/political safety	Housing stability	Resiliency	Lacks reactivity

Protective Factors

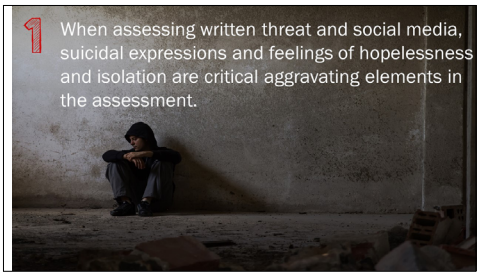
1. **Environmental and Emotional Stability:** Environmental and emotional stability occur when an individual's life experiences have consistency and constancy, and their reactions to change or crisis represent a similar calm and resilience. This is an indication that there are less elements pulling them toward creating disruption in the status quo through violent action. Here, the overall environment in which the person operates is positive without dramatic shifts. The person has stable employment and/or academic enrollment, and they are engaged in these professional or academic arenas. There have not been recent terminations or suspensions, and the family or home environment is generally stable and healthy. The person is not challenged by instability in their situation. They are connected and progressing toward academic or professional goals.
2. **Social Health and Connection:** A second protective factor relates to stability in relationships with family, friends, and significant others. The person feels socially connected in healthy and positive ways. They feel safe in their own skin, and do not feel marginalized or discriminated against based on their identity or identity group. They are surrounded by others where they can be themselves, feel accepted, and are not judged for their beliefs or circumstance. They feel emotionally connected to those around them which girds against a desire to harm or threaten.
3. **Access to Non-Violent Outlets:** Having access to alternative, non-violent courses of action is an important protective factor. Individuals have opportunities for positive collective action on issues and concerns instead of turning to violence. Especially when considering written threat, it's important to consider if this is someone seeking a safe space to communicate and discuss issues of concern or radical ideas about improving the way the world works.
4. **Empathy and Connection:** The empathetic or compassionate person demonstrates the ability to consider other's perspectives or other's ideals without seeing them as challenging or competitive to his or her own beliefs. This can manifest itself as tolerance and an appreciation of diverse perspectives as well. Empathy can be experienced when thinking about people who live differently than us, engaging with other cultures and confronting our own biases, as well as learning to listen to other's perspectives and collaborating with them.
5. **Positive Social and Individual Action:** Here, we see someone who is engaged in positive social action for the betterment of a group or community or even at a lesser developmental place of just positive action for the sake of their own individual consequence. The second is fairly simple. This individual has an awareness of how their choices result in positive or negative consequence minimally for themselves or those in their circle, and thus, chooses actions to avoid harm. On a higher level, positive social action includes a more inclusive and collaborative participation working together to improve situations, remove barriers to success, and foster positive change. This level of critical thinking, awareness of others, and inclusivity truly reflect the opposite of violent action and the risk factors.

Trolling to Leakage

Trolling: Deliberately upsetting people, usually via the internet, using dialogue, video, pictures and audio.

Leakage: The communication to a third party of intent to do harm.

Context is key. Information gathering is vital to BIT/CARE processes.



A central challenge is separating a **true threat**, what we call 'leakage,' that provides school officials a clue to stopping an attack from other content that may be disturbing, threatening or hurtful, but **lacks and actual intent or lethality** of an attack occurring.

We cannot dismiss potential leakage as trolling or lacking intent. We should encourage the sharing of all concerning writing or social media posts. Remember, the BIT is not punitive but can look at contextual information to determine the risk level.

We are more effective in our management of crises when we consider individual differences.

Cultural competence is the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from different cultures and beliefs than your own.

Teams should be diverse in gender identity, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, political affiliation, religious beliefs, physical and mental disability, and age.

What is Bias?
Bias is our tendency to see the world from our particular lens of experience. It can lead us to ignore the evidence or make assumptions not based on evidence. It can impact what we remember and what witnesses remember. It can create blinders for BIT team members and impact their ability to build rapport, connect, and create safe/neutral spaces. While we can never remove bias, we can train to make us more aware of how bias can affect decision making.

Types of Bias

- **Confirmation Bias:** Form an early hypothesis and tend to seek or overvalue evidence that fits it or confirms it. Are you interviewing or validating?
- **Dunning-Kruger Effect:** People who are terrible at a particular task think they are much better than they are, while people who are very good at it tend to underestimate their competence.
- **Anchor Bias:** The tendency to rely too heavily on the first piece of information we are given about a topic.
- **In Group/Out Group:** The tendency to be favorable toward the group that is similar to you.
- **Blind Spot:** Ability to spot systematic errors in others' decisions.
- **Availability Bias:** Reliance upon readily available (most recent) information.

Where does bias come from?

- Gender, gender identity experiences, and sexual orientation
- Race/ethnicity, world view, and generational expectations
- Mental illness or physical disabilities
- Different cultures or geographic areas
- Veteran history; and religious or political experiences
- Economic differences; and friend or peer groups