

# Threat Assessment

## Purpose

The Palmerton Area School District is committed to providing a safe and secure learning environment. The Palmerton Area School District is establishing a district-wide threat assessment program to provide for timely school-based threat assessment management in accordance with the Public School Codes of 1949, Article XII-E, Threat Assessment (Act 18 of 2019). The Palmerton Area School District will be using the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) as the Threat Assessment Model.

## Definition

**Threat** - Threat is a communication or behavior that indicates an individual poses a danger to the safety of school staff or students through acts of violence or other behavior that would cause harm to self or others. The threat may be expressed/communicated behaviorally, orally, visually, in writing, electronically, or through any other means. These actions can be considered a threat regardless of whether it is observed by or communicated directly to the target of the threat or observed by a third party, and regardless of whether the target of the threat is aware of the threat.

Transient Threat - Statements that do not express a lasting intent to harm someone, either intended as figures of speech or reflect feelings that dissipate in a short period of time.

Substantive Threat - Statements that express a continuing intent to harm someone that extends beyond the immediate incident or argument when the threat was made.

Threat Assessment - A problem solving approach to violence prevention that involves both assessment and intervention with individuals who have threatened violence toward others.

Threat Assessment Team - A multidisciplinary unit within an individual school building or district that will direct, manage, and document the school entity's threat assessment process. The *Team* is responsible for:

1. Reporting and Identifying Threats
2. Assessing and Classifying Threats
3. Responding to and Managing Threats

## Overview (The Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) Overview)

The Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) model guides school district teams in resolving and responding to student threats according to the CSTAG five-step decision tree located on the following page.

The Palmerton Area School District School District will utilize the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) model to respond to any and all reported school threats. All the members of the Palmerton Area School District School District Threat Assessment Team will receive training on the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG).

**THREAT ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE PROTOCOL®**

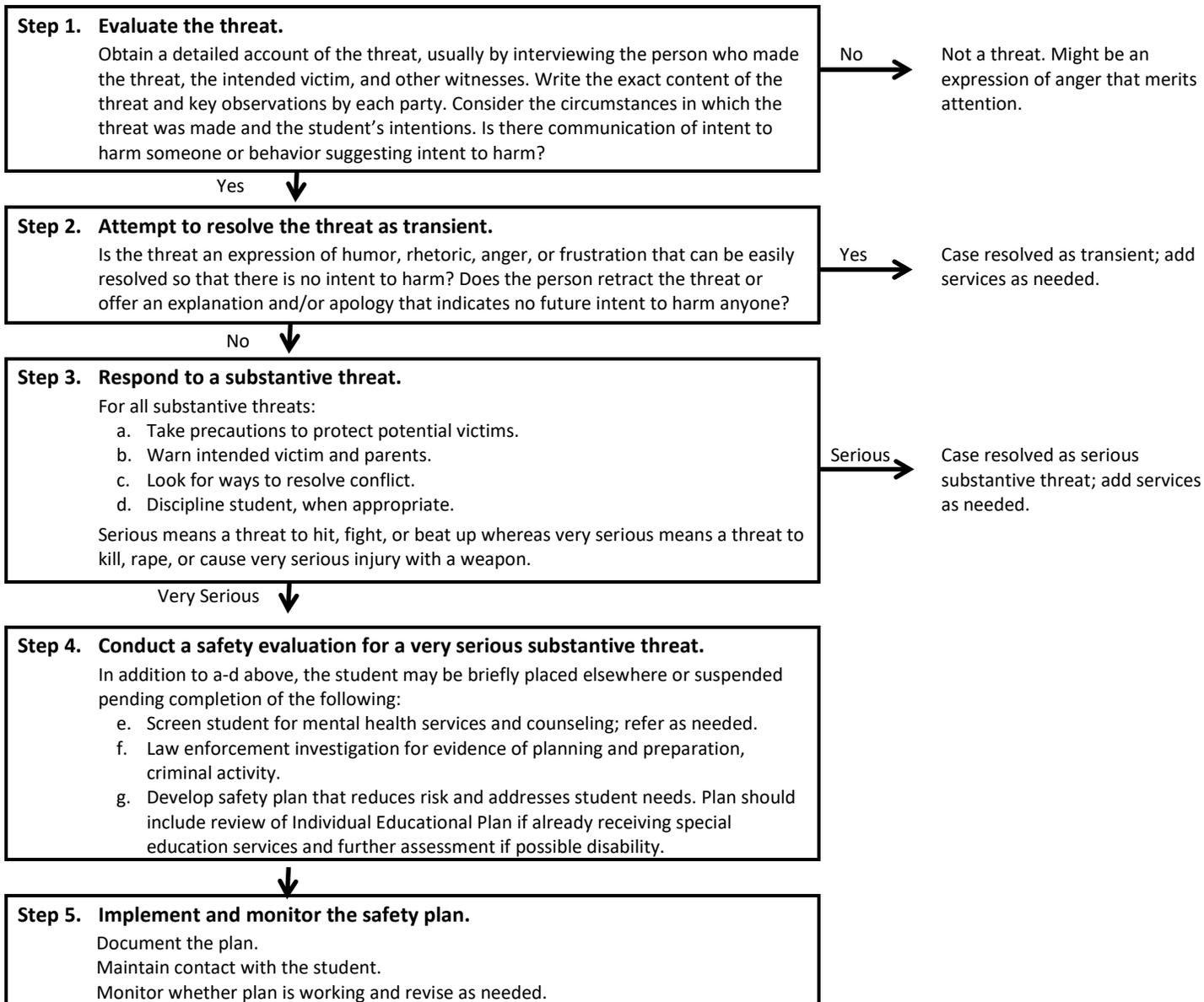
Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

**OVERVIEW**

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

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

**School Threat Assessment Decision Tree\***



## Threat Assessment Team Composition

According to *Article XIII-E, Threat Assessment (Act 18 of 2019) of the PA Public School Code of 1949* the Threat Assessment Teams should include personnel from a variety of disciplines and areas within the school community to ensure different points of view are represented in the threat assessment process. Further, *Article XIII-E, Threat Assessment (Act 18 of 2019) of the PA Public School Code of 1949* requires that Threat Assessment Teams include certain individuals:

Required Members (Article XIII-E)	Optional Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Individuals with expertise in:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ School Administration</li> <li>○ Special Education</li> <li>○ Counseling, School Psychology or Social Work</li> <li>○ School Health</li> <li>○ School Safety and Security Coordinator</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Other schools staff or community resources who can assist with the threat assessment process.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Examples Include;</b> School security personnel; law enforcement agencies (SRO); behavioral health professionals</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The size of a Threat Assessment Team will vary depending on the school entity but is typically between 3-5 people. Team members must work collaboratively with each other, with other school staff, and with available resources to support the threat assessment and management process and ensure the safety of the school and its students and staff. Each Team shall have a designated leader.

In addition to meeting whenever concerning student behavior or situations arise, Team members should meet on a regular basis to provide opportunities to learn and work together.

## Threat Assessment Team Responsibilities

- Reports and identifies the behavior of a student that is threatening, or potentially threatening, to self, other students, staff, school visitors, or school property.
  - Threats of self-harm or suicide unaccompanied by threats to harm others should be promptly evaluated according to PASD Policy #819 - Suicide Awareness Prevention and Response.
- Assesses and classifies the information about the student's behavior to determine a level of concern for the threat (Transient or Substantive). Teams and/or building principals should conduct interviews of the person(s) who reported the threat, the target(s) of the threat, other witnesses who have knowledge of the threat, and the individual who allegedly engaged in the threatening behavior or communication. It is important for Team members to adopt an investigative mindset and rely on the facts obtained from multiple sources.

- Respond to and manage the level of severity of the risk and whether reasonable modifications of policies, practices, or procedures will mitigate the risk. The Team will make individual assessments based on reasonable judgment, best available evidence, and/or current medical evidence as applicable.

### **Roles of Law Enforcement in Threat Assessments**

- Section 1303 - A of the PA Public School Code requires immediate reporting of certain enumerated offenses by Chief School Administrators to local law enforcement when committed on school property, at any school-sponsored activity, or on a conveyance providing transport to or from a school or school-sponsored activity.
- The Palmerton Area School District has a Memorandum of Understanding in place with the local law enforcement entities that cover the district as required by Article XIII-A of the Public School Code of 1949, popularly known as the “Safe Schools Act” as amended, 24 P.S. §§ 13-1301 -A-13-1313-A.
- If one of the School Security Officers assigned to the Palmerton Area School District is not available to serve on a Threat Assessment Team, the members of the Threat Assessment Teams will follow Pennsylvania Public School Code in determining appropriate law enforcement involvement.