BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT GUIDE

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1 INTRODUCTION

This manual provides an overview of the Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management process. In response to a series of school shootings in the 1990s, U.S. government authorities in law enforcement and education recommended the use of behavioral threat assessment in schools (Fein et al., 2002; O'Toole, 2000). Behavioral threat assessment (often referred to as threat assessment) is a systematic approach to violence prevention intended to distinguish serious threats, defined as behaviors or communications in which a person poses a threat of violence, from cases in which the threat is not serious and then to take appropriate prevention steps (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002).

Both the FBI and the Secret Service conducted studies of mass casualty, public shootings and found that the perpetrators were often victims of bullying or other trauma who had become angry and depressed, and were influenced by a variety of social, familial, and psychological factors (O'Toole, 2000; Vossekuil, 2002). These studies concluded because these characteristics can be found in throughout society, it is not possible to develop a profile or checklist that could be used to pinpoint the small number of truly violent people among them. As a result, both the FBI and Secret Service cautioned against a profiling approach.

What is threat assessment? Threat assessment was developed by the Secret Service to deal with persons who threaten to attack public officials and has since evolved into a standard approach to analyze a variety of dangerous situations, such as threats of workplace violence (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998). A threat assessment is conducted when a person (or persons) threatens to commit a violent act or engages in behavior that appears to threaten what is termed "targeted violence." Threat assessment is a process of evaluating the threat—and the circumstances.

This system is designed for use with juvenile or adults who are engaged in behavior that suggest the potential for aggression directed at other people. It is not designed for use with individuals who are suicidal, acting out sexually or who are setting fires, unless they are doing so as an act of aggression intending severe or lethal injury to others.

This protocol is only for use by staff who have been trained on the behavioral threat assessment process by Total Safety Solution instructors.

This protocol does not predict future violence nor is it a foolproof method of assessing an individual's or group's risk of harm to others. This protocol is not a checklist that can be quantified. It is a guide designed to assist in the investigation of potential danger (identify circumstances and risk factors that may increase risk for potential aggression) and to assist professional staff in development of a management plan. Furthermore, as circumstances change, so too does risk potential; therefore, if you are reviewing a completed assessment at a

date after assessment completion, be mindful of supervision, intervention, and the passage of time.

Complete the following protocol through investigation conducted by the Threat Assessment Team (a multidisciplinary team consists of an administrator, counselor, and possibly law enforcement personnel). The administrator, as the case manager, should lead the discussion using the noted step-by step instructions and accompanying questions as a guide. The following people should be considered for participation in initial meetings as sources of additional information:

- Teachers, coaches, case managers, other educators. (education)
- Tutors, front desk, subject retention support or other people who have contact with subject/subjects.
- Parents/Guardians, if time and circumstances allow. (If parents/guardians are unable to attend, complete the Parent Interview form.)
- Case managers, Probation Officers if adjudicated or a ward of the Court.
- Human Resources staff, managers, and/or security team members.

Many cases can be managed in **Steps 1** and **2** of the threat assessment process with appropriate interventions. **Step 1** of the assessment usually takes 20 to 45 minutes and is a method of documenting concerns and determining the seriousness of the threat. It is also the method of determining if there is a need to request a more extensive assessment by staff who specialize in Threat Assessment (Step 3).

2   THE THREAT ASSESSMENT PROCESS

2.1   STEP 1
A subject of concern is brought to the attention of a site administrator. The site administrator, or their designee, will evaluate the threat by interviewing witnesses, noting the exact content of the threat, and gathering information on the circumstances in which the threat was made. In most cases, the threatening individual is interviewed and given an opportunity to explain what he or she meant by the threatening statement or behavior. The staff member conducting the initial inquiry will complete the *Behavioral Incident Report*.

2.2   STEP 2
Once the staff member has completed the initial interviews and gathered all the relevant information concerning the threat or cause of concern, they will consider the credibility and seriousness of the threat. A threat is considered **transient** if it can be determined that the subject has no intent to carry out the threat. If the subject is cooperative and provides a convincing explanation or apology, the threat is considered transient and the assessment is

concluded here. Transient threats do not require protective action or security efforts. On the other hand, if the team is unable to resolve the threat or they are unsure about the threat's status, then the decision tree directs them to respond to the threat as a **substantive** threat.

2.3   STEP 3

At Step 3, the Site Threat Assessment Team (STAT) responds to a **substantive** threat. The STAT team completes a comprehensive threat assessment using the *Behavioral Threat Assessment Worksheet*. All substantive threat responses require protective action, which varies depending on the circumstances of the threat and how the threat might be carried out. At a minimum, if a specific person is identified as a target, the assessment team will complete the *Plan to Protect Targeted or Victimized Person* form. Protective action typically involves notifying the intended victim and his or her family. Protective action could also involve increased monitoring or supervision of the threatening subject. Depending on the nature and credibility of the threat, substantive threats are further classified as either Category 1 through Category 5 (see Behavioral Threat Assessment Worksheet). Threats involving a simple assault, or a fight and are classified a Category 5 through Category 3 can resolved at this point. In contrast, a Category 1 or 2 subject typically involves a threat to kill or a threat to use a lethal weapon or inflict severe injury on someone.

2.4   STEP 4

Step 4 is undertaken for all Category 1 or 2 subjects. In addition to the protective actions taken at Step 3, the STAT team will take three additional actions:

- First, the subject will be screened for mental health services or counseling. This typically involves an interview by a mental health professional with the goal of determining whether the subject needs mental health services and understanding what conflict or problem underlies the threat.
- Second, there is a law enforcement investigation of the case. This investigation will look for evidence of planning and preparation, to determine whether a crime has been committed, and assess what additional protective actions might be needed.
- The third action is to integrate findings from the mental health assessment and law enforcement investigation into a safety plan (*Safety Management Form*). In the case of a school based threat involving a juvenile, the threatening subject might be suspended from school for several days until this plan can be formulated. The safety plan determines the conditions under which the subject can return to school or have a change in placement. For an adult in a workplace, they may be placed on administrative leave or terminated.

2.5 STEP 5

At Step 5, the STAT team implements and monitors the safety plan formulated in Step 4. The team maintains contact with the subject and makes any necessary changes to the safety plan.

2.6 THREAT ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT SYSTEM DECISION TREE

Step 1. Initial inquiry and evaluation of the threat.

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

No →
Not a threat. Might be an expression of anger that merits attention.

YES ↓

Step 2. Attempt to resolve the threat as transient.

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

Yes →
Case resolved as transient; discipline and add services as needed.

NO ↓

Step 3. Respond to a substantive threat and complete full assessment.

For all substantive threats:

a. Complete threat assessment.
b. Complete Notification Log.
c. Plan to Protect Targeted or Victimized Student.
d. Take precautions to protect potential victims.
e. Warn intended victim and parents.
f. Look for ways to resolve conflict.
g. Discipline student, when appropriate.

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

Cat 3 though Cat 4 →
Case resolved as serious substantive threat; add services as needed. Proceed to Step 5 if necessary.

Category 1 and Category 2 ↓

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

In addition to a-g above,

h. Call **911**.
i. Law enforcement investigation for evidence of planning and preparation, criminal activity.
j. Screen student for mental health services and counseling; refer as needed.

Develop safety plan that reduces risk and addresses student needs. Plan should include review of Individual Educational Plan if already receiving special education services and further assessment of possible disability.

Step 5. Implement and monitor the safety plan.

Document the plan in the Student Safety Management form.

Maintain contact with the student.

Monitor whether plan is working and revise as needed.

3 STEP 1 – INITIAL INQUIRY AND DOCUMENTATION

When a subject of concern is brought to the attention of the site administrator, or their designee, they will evaluate the threat by interviewing witnesses, noting the exact content of the threat, and gathering information on the circumstances in which the threat was made. In most cases, the threatening subject is interviewed and given an opportunity to explain what he or she meant by the threatening statement or behavior. The staff member conducting the initial inquiry will complete the *Behavioral Incident Report*.

The first consideration before beginning the inquiry is addressing any immediate safety issues. If you suspect an imminent threat to life, call law enforcement's emergency number (911) and then the district's Security Department. Take physical protective measures if necessary, such as a site wide lockdown or shelter-in-place until law enforcement or security personnel arrive.

Before conducting an in-person interview with the subject of concern, choose a safe location to conduct the interview and separate the subject from their belongings. A consensual search of their clothing should also be completed before the interview to ensure the subject is not concealing a weapon. If the subject does not comply with a consensual search call security staff or law enforcement to complete a search. Follow your organization's policy and procedures for searching a subject and their belongings.

4 STEP 2 – DETERMINE TRANSIENT OR SUBSTANTIVE THREAT

All threats should be evaluated, especially in a school or workplace setting. STAT teams are challenged to avoid overreacting to threats that are not serious and focus their attention on serious threats that merit protective action. The transient/substantive distinction is designed to help threat assessment teams make a structured professional judgment to meet this challenge. The transient/substantive distinction requires professional judgment by the STAT team based on an assessment of all available information about the subject and the circumstances of the threat; therefore, it is crucial to assess the reliability and validity of the transient/substantive distinction.

4.1   TRANSIENT THREATS

A transient threat is an intentionally broad category intended to encompass all forms of threats that do not reflect a genuine intent to harm others (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). The majority of subject threats are transient and can stem from motives including humor, anger, frustration, or fear (Cornell et al., 2004; Nekvasil & Cornell, 2012). Transient threats include a variety of qualitatively different threats that nevertheless are not serious. Examples of transient threats include a subject exclaiming, "I'm gonna kill you" as a joke or as a competitive statement during a game, or a subject playfully using his or her fingers to shoot another classmate. Other transient threats are made as an expression of anger that nevertheless do not reflect a serious intent to harm someone, such as a subject stating rhetorically, "I'd like to kill that jerk" in anger but not actually possessing an intent or plan to kill anyone (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). Transient threats can differ widely in motive and context and can be provocative and disruptive; but from the practical perspective of threat assessment, they all represent behaviors that do not reflect a real intent to harm others. The transient/substantive distinction is not based solely on a linguistic analysis of the content of the subject's statements, but includes information gathered from other sources. In addition, the team considers the subject's response to the assessment and whether he or she is able to explain his or her behavior, retract or clarify the threatening statement, and demonstrate a willingness to rectify the situation.

Examples of Transient Threats

1. "I'm gonna kill you" - said as a joke.
2. ''I'm gonna kill you" - said in the heat of competition during a basketball game.
3. Two students use their fingers to "shoot" one another while playing cops and robbers.
4. "I'm gonna bust you up"- said in anger but then retracted after the subject calms down.
5. "You better watch your back!" - said to intimidate someone but retracted after the subject calms down.
6. "I'll get you next time" - said after a fight but retracted after the two subjects reconcile.
7. "Watch out or I'll hurt you" - said to intimidate someone but retracted after the subject calms down.
8. I oughta shoot that teacher" - said in anger but retracted after the student calms down.
9. "There's a bomb in the building" - said in a phone call for the purpose of disrupting school/work, with there being no actual bomb.
10. A student/worker is found with a pocket knife that he accidentally left in his backpack.

4.2 SUBSTANTIVE THREATS

If a threat is not deemed transient, then STAT teams follow the decision tree to classify the threat as substantive. Substantive threats are behaviors or statements that represent a serious risk of harm to others (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). Substantive threats are characterized by qualities that reflect serious intent, such as planning and preparation, recruitment of accomplices, and acquisition of a weapon. Examples of likely substantive threats include a subject threatening "I'll get you next time" after a fight and refusing mediation for the dispute, or a subject who threatens to stab a classmate/co-worker and is found to have a knife in their backpack.

A substantive threat may indicate that a subject is on a pathway to violence and one of the "warning behaviors" or behavioral patterns that indicate a person has serious intent to carry out a threat (Meloy, Hoffmann, Guldimann, & James, 2012). The following warning behaviors are presumptive indicators of a substantive threat.

> **Examples of Substantive Threats**
>
> 1. "I'm gonna kill you" - said with an intent to injure.
> 2. "I'm gonna kill you" - said while holding a weapon and not jokingly.
> 3. Two subjects exchange threats and then throw rocks at each other.
> 4. "I'm gonna bust you up"- said in anger and not retracted later.
> 5. "I could break you in half" - said in an intimidating manner, followed by stony silence.
> 6. "I'll get you next time" - said after a fight and the student refuses mediation.
> 7. "Watch out or I'll hurt you " - said by a subject with a history of bullying.
> 8. "I oughta shoot that teacher" - said by a student who later denies making the statement.
> 9. "There's a bomb in the building" - said in a phone call made by a subject who later is found to have bomb-making materials and plans at home.
> 10. A subject who threatened to stab a classmate/co-worker is found to have a pocketknife in his backpack.

Researchers examining incidents of targeted violence within schools as well as in other settings found that most attackers had access to weapons prior to the violent incident and also exhibited leakage, suicidal ideation, and obsession with violence (Hoffmann & Roshdi, 2013; Mohandie, 2014; O'Toole, 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2002). Attackers also tended to demonstrate more warning behaviors as they moved along a pathway to violence (Meloy et al., 2012). Meloy and O'Toole (2011) defined leakage as "the communication to a third party of an intent to do harm to a target" (p. 514). Leakage can occur through oral, written, or social media communications (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011; O'Toole, 2000). Subjects might intentionally confide

in a peer or communicate their violent plans through their journals or social media pages. In their study of school violence, the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education noted that in 81% of the 37 violent incidents reviewed between 1974 and 2000, at least one individual knew the attacker was considering an act of violence before it transpired (Vossekuil et al., 2002). These individuals were most often (93%) friends, classmates, or siblings; only rarely (17%) did the attackers threaten their intended targets directly. Although direct threats to the intended victims are rare, both leakage and direct threats are warning behaviors that can signify that an attacker is moving along a pathway of violence (Hoffmann & Roshdi, 2013; Meloy, Hoffmann, Roshdi, Glaz-Ocik, & Guldimann, 2014). Research in German schools also found that warning behaviors, such as a preoccupation with violent media, acquisition of weapons, and suicide ideation, signal an attacker's escalation along a pathway of violence (Hoffmann & Roshdi, 2013).

> **Presumptive Indicators of a Substantive Threat**
> 1. The threat contains specific, plausible details. ("I am going to shoot Mr. Smith with my shotgun," rather than "I am going to set off an atomic bomb" or "I'll get you for that.")
> 2. The threat has been repeated over time or the subject has told multiple parties of the threat.
> 3. The threat is reported to others as a plan, or there are suggestions that violent action has been planned. ("Wait and see what happens next Tuesday in the cafeteria!")
> 4. There are accomplices, or the subject has sought out accomplices, in order to carry out the threat.
> 5. The subject has invited peers to observe the threat being carried out. ("Come and watch.")
> 6. There is physical evidence of intent to carry out the threat. Such evidence could include written plans, lists of victims, drawings, weapons, bomb materials, or literature encouraging or describing how to carry out acts of violence.

Researchers also found that almost all the attackers (93%) engaged in behaviors that concerned others prior to the incident (Vossekuil et al., 2002). The concerning behaviors of the attackers included the use of weapons (63%), fascination with violence displayed through class assignments or verbal communications (59%), and suicidal ideation (78%). The majority of the attackers had access to weapons prior to the incident (68%) and had a known history of weapon use (63%). Lastly, the investigators found that some attackers had committed a known act of violence prior to the incident (31%) and/or had previously been arrested (27%). Although these concerning behaviors apply to only a subset of the attackers included in the study, many researchers have concluded that a history of violence is the strongest predictor of future violence (Monahan & Steadman, 1994). Overall, the threat assessment literature suggests that warning behaviors raise concern that a threat is serious (Meloy et al., 2012; O'Toole, 2000; Vossekuil et al., 2002).

4.3 OTHER DETERMINING FACTORS

Consider the age, credibility, and discipline record of the subject who made the threat. An older subject is considered more likely to make a substantive threat than a younger subject. A subject who acknowledges his or her inappropriate behavior and gives a credible denial of intent to actually harm someone is less likely to have made a substantive threat than a subject who

doesn't acknowledge his or her behavior. Judge credibility based on the subject's presentation of what happened as well as on all other information you have about this subject, including personal knowledge. Be sure to compare the subject's account with accounts of other witnesses to identify any discrepancies or omissions. A subject with a discipline record that indicates previous aggressive behavior, dishonesty, or both is considered more likely to make a substantive threat than a subject whose discipline record is more favorable. If there is significant doubt whether a threat is transient or substantive, treat the threat as substantive.

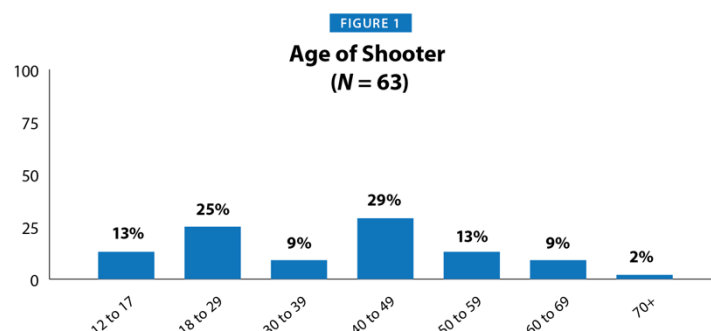# 5   PRE-ATTACK BEHAVIORS OF ACTIVE SHOOTERS

In June of 2018, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice published what they called their Phase II study of active shooting incidents in the United States, *A Study of the Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States Between 2000 and 2013*. This is a follow up report to their Phase I study published in 2014 titled, *A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013*. The following is a summary of the 2018 report's findings.

The Phase II study included only those cases where the FBI obtained law enforcement investigative files that contained "background" materials (e.g., interviews with family members, acquaintances, neighbors; school or employment records; writings generated by the subject) adequate to answer the protocol questions. In addition, as this study focused on identifying pre-attack behaviors of those on a trajectory to violence, active shooting events which appeared to be spontaneous reactions to situational factors (e.g., fights that escalated) were excluded. This resulted in a final sample of 63 active shooting incidents included in the 2018 study.

## 5.1   SHOOTER DEMOGRAPHICS

Age:

The youngest active shooter was 12 years old and the oldest was 88 years old with an average age of 37.8 years. Grouping the active shooters by age revealed the following:

FIGURE 1

Age of Shooter
(*N* = 63)

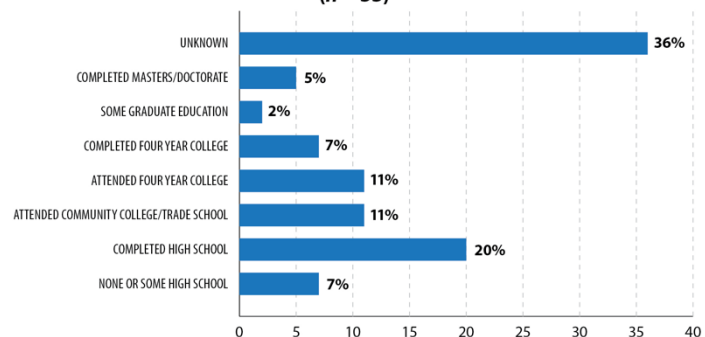| Age range	Percent
12 to 17	13%
18 to 29	25%
30 to 39	9%
40 to 49	29%
50 to 59	13%
60 to 69	9%
70+	2%

Gender and Race:
The sample was overwhelmingly male (94%, *n* = 59), with only four females in the data set (6%, *n* = 4), and varied by race as shown in Figure 2:

FIGURE 2
Race (*N* = 63)

- ASIAN 10%
- BLACK 16%
- WHITE 63%
- HISPANIC 6%
- MIDDLE EASTERN 3%
- NATIVE AMERICAN 2%
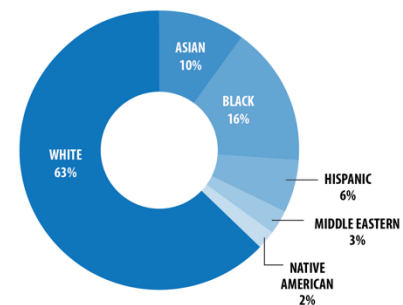
Highest Level of Education:
None of the active shooters under the age of 18 had successfully completed high school, and one (age 12) had not yet entered high school. When known, the highest level of education of adults varied considerably, as shown in Figure 3:

FIGURE 3
Highest Level of Education Completed – 18 Years and Older
(*n* = 55)

- UNKNOWN — 36%
- COMPLETED MASTERS/DOCTORATE — 5%
- SOME GRADUATE EDUCATION — 2%
- COMPLETED FOUR YEAR COLLEGE — 7%
- ATTENDED FOUR YEAR COLLEGE — 11%
- ATTENDED COMMUNITY COLLEGE/TRADE SCHOOL — 11%
- COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL — 20%
- NONE OR SOME HIGH SCHOOL — 7%

*Does not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Employment:
The active shooters who were under 18 years old were all students. As featured in Figure 4, nearly equal percentages of the adult active shooters 18 years or older were employed as were unemployed, and 7% (*n* = 4) were primarily students. The rest of the adults were categorized as retired, disabled/receiving benefits, or other/unknown.

FIGURE 4
Employment – 18 Years and Older
(*n* = 55)

- UNEMPLOYED 38%
- STUDENT 7%
- OTHER 4%
- RETIRED 4%
- DISABLED 2%
- UNKNOWN 2%
- EMPLOYED 44%
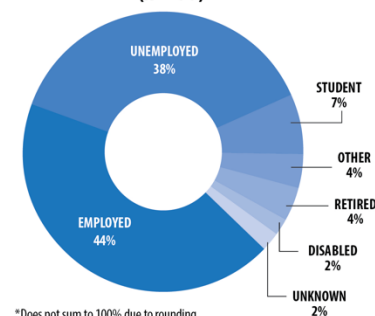
*Does not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Military:
Of the active shooters 18 and older, 24% (*n* = 13) had at least some military experience, with six having served in the Army, three in the Marines, two in the Navy, and one each in the Air Force and the Coast Guard.
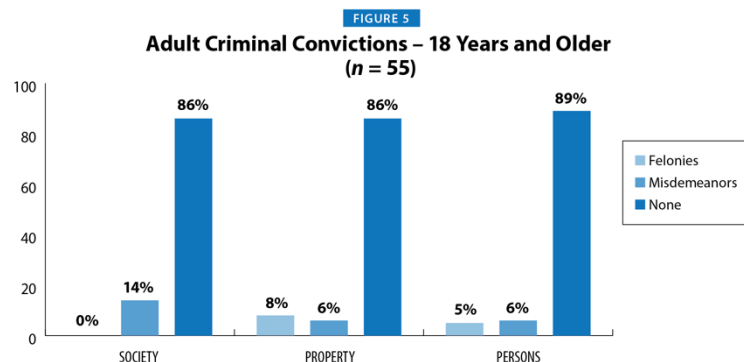
Relationship Status:
The active shooters included in the Phase II study were mostly single at the time of the offense (57%, *n* = 36). Thirteen percent (*n* = 8) were married, while another 13% were divorced. The remaining 11% were either partnered but not married (*n* = 7) or separated (6%, *n* = 4).

Criminal Convictions and Anti-Social Behavior:
Nineteen of the active shooters aged 18 and over (35%) had adult convictions prior to the active shooting event. As visualized in Figure 5, the convictions can be categorized as crimes against society, property, or persons. The category of "crimes against society" included offenses such as driving under the influence, disorderly conduct and the possession of drug paraphernalia. Both the

FIGURE 5
Adult Criminal Convictions – 18 Years and Older
(*n* = 55)

There was only one case where an active shooter had both a felony and a misdemeanor conviction in a single category (under "Property").

misdemeanor and felony "crimes against property" involved non-violent offenses, such as conspiracy to commit theft, theft, possession of stolen property, and criminal mischief. The misdemeanor "crimes against persons" were not inherently dangerous, but the felony "crimes against persons" involved convictions for criminal sexual assault of a family member, aggravated stalking, and endangering a person (although no active shooter was convicted of more than one crime against a person).

5.2 PLANNING AND PREPARATION
This study examined two related but separate temporal aspects of the active shooters' pre-attack lives — total time spent *planning* the attack and total time spent *preparing* for the attack.

With regard to specific planning activities, care should be taken in the interpretation of the data. For instance, our study indicates that few active shooters overall approached or conducted surveillance on their target (14%, *n* = 9), and fewer still researched or studied the target site where the attack occurred (10%, *n* = 6). The likely reason for this finding is that

FIGURE 6
Time Spent Planning
(*n* = 34)

Does not sum to 100% due to rounding.

the active shooters often attacked people and places with which they were already familiar. There was a known connection between the active shooters and the attack site in the majority
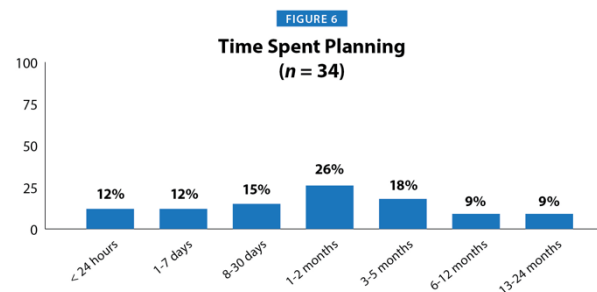
of cases (73%, *n* = 46), often a workplace or former workplace for those 18 and older (35%, *n* = 19), and almost always a school or former school for those younger than 18 (88%, *n* = 7), indicating that in most cases the active shooter was already familiar with both the attack site as well as the persons located at the site.
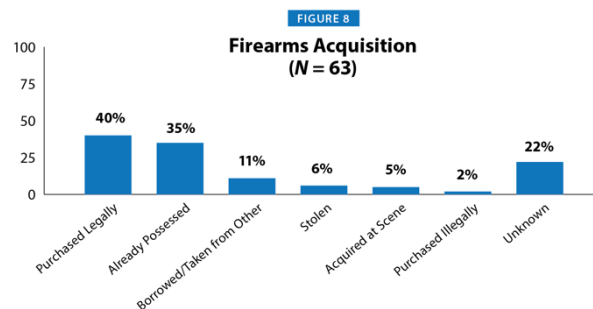
Preparing was narrowly defined for this study as actions taken to procure the means for the attack, typically items such as a handgun or rifle, ammunition, special clothing and/or body armor. The focus was on activities that could have been noticed by others (e.g., a visit to a gun store, the delivery of ammunition) and which were essential to the

FIGURE 7
Time Spent Preparing
(*n* = 46)

execution of the plan. The FBI was able to find evidence of time spent preparing in more cases than for time spent planning (likely reflecting the overt nature of procuring materials as opposed to the presumably largely internal thought process of planning).
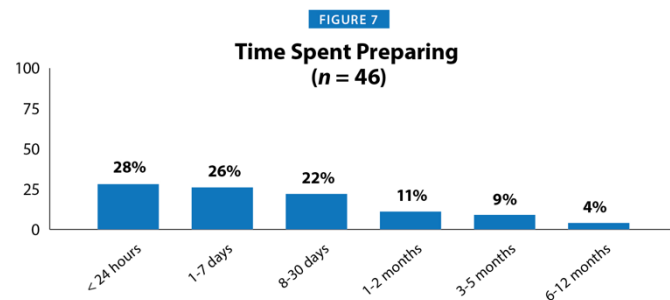
5.3   FIREARMS ACQUISITION

As part of the review of the active shooter's preparations, the FBI explored investigative records and attempted to identify how each active shooter obtained the firearm(s) used during the attack. Most commonly (40%, *n* = 25), the active shooter purchased a firearm or firearms legally and specifically for the purpose of perpetrating the attack. A very small percentage purchased

FIGURE 8
Firearms Acquisition
(*N* = 63)

*Data percentages detailed above add to greater than 100% as active shooters could have obtained multiple firearms in different ways.

firearms illegally (2%, *n* = 1) or stole the firearm (6%, *n* = 4). Some (11%, *n* = 7) borrowed or took the firearm from a person known to them. A significant number of active shooters (35%, *n* = 22) already possessed a firearm and did not appear (based on longevity of possession) to have obtained it for the express purpose of committing the shooting.

5.4   STRESSORS

Stressors are physical, psychological, or social forces that place real or perceived demands/pressures on an individual and which may cause psychological and/or physical distress. Stress is considered to be a well-established correlate of criminal behavior. For this study, a wide variety of potential stressors were assessed, including financial pressures, physical

health concerns, interpersonal conflicts with family, friends, and colleagues (work and/or school), mental health issues, criminal and civil law issues, and substance abuse.

Overall, the data reflects that active shooters were typically experiencing multiple stressors (an average of 3.6 separate stressors) in the year before they attacked. For example, in the year before his attack, one active shooter was facing disciplinary action at school for abuse of a teacher, was himself abused and neglected at home, and had significant conflict with his peers. Another active shooter was under six separate stressors, including a recent arrest for drunk driving, accumulating significant debt, facing eviction, showing signs of both depression and anxiety, and experiencing both the criminal and civil law repercussions of an incident three months before the attack where he barricaded himself in a hotel room and the police were called.

TABLE 1: STRESSORS

Stressors	Number	%
Mental health	39	62
Financial strain	31	49
Job related	22	35
Conflicts with friends/peers	18	29
Marital problems	17	27
Abuse of illicit drugs/alcohol	14	22
Other (e.g. caregiving responsibilities)	14	22
Conflict at school	14	22
Physical injury	13	21
Conflict with parents	11	18
Conflict with other family members	10	16
Sexual stress/frustration	8	13
Criminal problems	7	11
Civil problems	6	10
Death of friend/relative	4	6
None	1	2

5.5   MENTAL HEALTH

There are important and complex considerations regarding mental health, both because it is the most prevalent stressor and because of the common but erroneous inclination to assume that anyone who commits an active shooting must de facto be mentally ill. First, the *stressor* "mental health" is not synonymous with a *diagnosis* of mental illness. The stressor "mental health" indicates that the active shooter appeared to be struggling with (most commonly)

depression, anxiety, paranoia, etc. in their daily life in the year before the attack. There may be complex interactions with other stressors that give rise to what may ultimately be transient manifestations of behaviors and moods that would not be sufficient to warrant a formal diagnosis of mental illness. In this context, it is exceedingly important to highlight that the FBI could only verify that 25% (*n* = 16) of the active shooters in Phase II were known to have been diagnosed by a mental health professional with a mental illness *of any kind* prior to the offense. The FBI could not determine if a diagnosis had been given in 37% (*n* = 23) of cases.

Of the 16 cases where a diagnosis prior to the incident could be ascertained, 12 active shooters had a mood disorder; four were diagnosed with an anxiety disorder; three were diagnosed with a psychotic disorder; and two were diagnosed with a personality disorder. Finally, one active shooter was diagnosed with Autism spectrum disorder; one with a developmental disorder; and one was described as "other." Having a diagnosed mental illness was unsurprisingly related to a higher incidence of concurrent mental health stressors among active shooters.

5.6   CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

Concerning behaviors are *observable* behaviors exhibited by the active shooter. For this study, a wide variety of concerning behaviors were considered, including those related to potential symptoms of a mental health disorder, interpersonal interactions, quality of the active shooter's thinking or communication, recklessness, violent media usage, changes in hygiene and weight, impulsivity, firearm behavior, and physical aggression. Although these may be related to stressors in the active shooter's life, the focus here was not on the internal, subjective experience of the active shooter, but rather on what was *objectively knowable* to others.
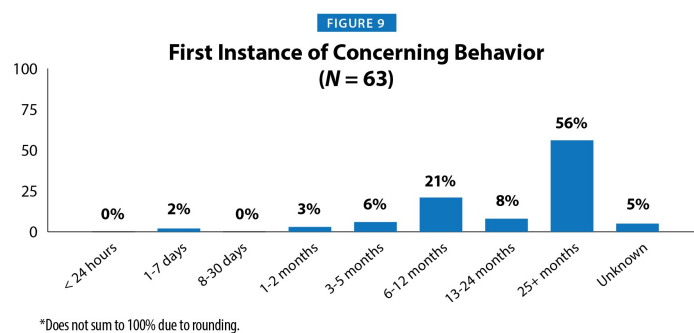
TABLE 2: CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

Concerning Behavior	Number	%
Mental health	39	62
Interpersonal interactions	36	57
Leakage	35	56
Quality of thinking or communication	34	54
Work performance*	11	46
School performance**	5	42
Threats/confrontations	22	35
Anger	21	33
Physical aggression	21	33
Risk-taking	13	21
Firearm behavior	13	21
Violent media usage	12	19
Weight/eating	8	13

Drug abuse	8	13
Impulsivity	7	11
Alcohol abuse	6	10
Physical health	6	10
Other (e.g. idolizing criminals)	5	8
Sexual behavior	4	6
Quality of sleep	3	5
Hygiene/appearance	2	3

When Were the Concerning Behaviors Noticed?

Since the overwhelming majority of active shooters (all but three) displayed at least two concerning behaviors, there are a number of different ways to assess the data. One way is to examine the data by active shooter and to observe the first instance that any concerning behavior was noticed (this could not be determined for three active shooters).

FIGURE 9

First Instance of Concerning Behavior
(*N* = 63)

*Does not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Bar chart values: < 24 hours 0%, 1-7 days 2%, 8-30 days 0%, 1-2 months 3%, 3-5 months 6%, 6-12 months 21%, 13-24 months 8%, 25+ months 56%, Unknown 5%.

5.7   PRIMARY GRIEVANCE

A grievance is defined for this study as the cause of the active shooter's distress or resentment; a perception — not necessarily based in reality — of having been wronged or treated unfairly or inappropriately. More than a typical feeling of resentment or passing anger, a grievance often results in a grossly distorted preoccupation with a sense of injustice, like an injury that fails to heal. These thoughts can saturate a person's thinking and foster a pervasive sense of imbalance between self-image and the (real or perceived) humiliation. This nagging sense of unfairness can spark an overwhelming desire to "right the wrong" and achieve a measure of satisfaction and/or revenge. In some cases, an active shooter might have what appeared to be multiple grievances but, where possible, the FBI sought to determine the primary grievance. Based on a review of the academic literature and the facts of the cases themselves, the FBI identified eight categories of grievances, with an additional category of "other" for grievances that were entirely idiosyncratic.

TABLE 4: PRIMARY GRIEVANCE

Primary Grievance	Number	%
Adverse interpersonal action against the shooter	21	33
Adverse employment action against the shooter	10	16
Other (e.g. general hatred of others)	6	10
Adverse governmental action against the shooter	3	5
Adverse academic action against the shooter	2	3
Adverse financial action against the shooter	2	3
Domestic	2	3
Hate crime	2	3
Ideology/extremism	2	3
Unknown	13	21

5.8   PRECIPITATING EVENTS

Of the 50 active shooters who had an identifiable grievance, nearly half of them experienced a precipitating or triggering event related to the grievance (44%, *n* = 22). Seven active shooters (14%) did not experience a precipitating event, and the FBI could not determine whether the remaining 21 (42%) did. Precipitating events generally occurred close in time to the shooting and included circumstances such as an adverse ruling in a legal matter, romantic rejection, and the loss of a job.

5.9   SUICIDE: IDEATION AND ATTEMPTS

For this study, "suicidal ideation" was defined as thinking about or planning suicide, while "suicide attempt" was defined as a non-fatal, self-directed behavior with the intent to die, regardless of whether the behavior ultimately results in an injury of any kind. Although these definitions are broad, the FBI concluded that an active shooter had suicidal ideation or engaged in a suicide attempt only when based on specific, non-trivial evidence.

Nearly half of the active shooters had suicidal ideation or engaged in suicide-related behaviors at some time prior to the attack (48%, *n* = 30), while five active shooters (8%) displayed no such behaviors (the status of the remaining 28 active shooters was unknown due to a lack of sufficient evidence to make a reasonable determination).

An overwhelming majority of the 30 suicidal active shooters showed signs of suicidal ideation (90%, *n* = 27), and seven made actual suicide attempts (23%). Nearly three-quarters (70%, *n* = 21) of these behaviors occurred within one year of the shooting.

5.10   CONCERNING COMMUNICATIONS

One useful way to analyze concerning communications is to divide them into two categories: *threats/confrontations* and *leakage of intent.*

5.10.1   Threats/Confrontations

Threats are *direct communications to a target* of intent to harm and may be delivered in person or by other means (e.g., text, email, telephone). For this study, threats need not be verbalized or written; the FBI considered in-person confrontations that were intended to intimidate or cause safety concerns for the target as falling under the category of threats as well.

More than half of the 40 active shooters who had a target made threats or had a prior confrontation (55%, *n* = 22). When threats or confrontations occurred, they were almost always in person (95%, *n* = 21) and only infrequently in writing or electronically (14%, *n* = 3). Two active shooters made threats both in person and in writing/electronically.

5.10.2   Leakage

Leakage occurs when a person intentionally or unintentionally reveals clues to a *third-party* about feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes or intentions that may signal the intent to commit a violent act. Indirect threats of harm are included as leakage, but so are less obvious, subtle threats, innuendo about a desire to commit a violent attack, or boasts about the ability to harm others. Leakage can be found not only in verbal communications, but also in writings (e.g., journals, school assignments, artwork, poetry) and in online interactions (e.g., blogs, tweets, texts, video postings). Prior research has shown that leakage of intent to commit violence is common before attacks perpetrated by both adolescents and adults but is more common among adolescents.

Here, too, leakage was prevalent, with over half of the active shooters leaking intent to commit violence (56%, *n* = 35). In the Phase II sample, 88% (*n* = 7) of those active shooters age 17 and younger leaked intent to commit violence, while 51% (*n* = 28) of adult active shooters leaked their intent. The leaked intent to commit violence was not always directed at the eventual victims of the shootings; in some cases what was communicated was a more general goal of doing harm to others, apparently without a particular person or group in mind.

5.10.3   Legacy Tokens

Finally, the FBI considered whether or not an active shooter had constructed a "legacy token" which has been defined as a communication prepared by the offender to claim credit for the attack and articulate the motives underlying the shooting. Examples of legacy tokens include manifestos, videos, social media postings, or other communications deliberately created by the shooter and delivered or staged for discovery by others, usually near in time to the shooting. In 30% (*n* = 19) of the cases included in this study, the active shooter created a legacy token prior to the attack.

5.11 DIRECT THREATS

Although more than half of the active shooters with pre-attack targets made threats (*n* = 22), in the majority (65%) of the overall cases no threats were made to a target, and the FBI cautions that the absence of a direct threat should not be falsely reassuring to those assessing the potential for violence raised by other circumstances and factors. Nor should the presence of a threat be considered conclusive. There is a significant amount of research and experience to demonstrate that direct threats are not correlated to a subsequent act of targeted violence.

It is important to highlight that in this Phase II study the overwhelming majority of direct threats were verbally delivered by the offender to a future victim. Only a very small percentage of threats were communicated via writing or electronically. In many ways this is not surprising. Written, directly communicated threats against a target (e.g., "I'm going to shoot and kill everyone here on Tuesday") often spark a predictable response that includes a heightened law enforcement presence and the enhancement of security barriers. These responses are highly undesirable to an offender planning an active shooting. Verbal threats issued directly to another person appear to be far more common among the active shooters included in the Phase II study.

6 STEP 3 – CONDUCTING THE THREAT ASSESSMENT

The risk factors used in this threat assessment tool are adapted from the U.S. Secret Service's 10 key questions to guide a protective intelligence or threat assessment investigation (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998). These questions flow directly from the fundamental threat assessment principles outlined in Borum and Vossekuil's: "Threat assessment: Defining an approach to assessing risk for targeted violence." (Behavioral Sciences & the Law)

1. Motive for violence or threat
2. Expressed intent to attack
3. Violent fantasies or homicidal ideas
4. Pre-Attack Behaviors
5. Means and Access
6. Hopelessness, personal stress, and negative coping
7. Anger
8. Substance abuse
9. History of violence and criminal activity
10. Inhibitors against violence

While it is a complex interaction of risk factors, warning signs, situational and contextual barriers, and mental states that leads to violence, it has been suggested that there are two primary types of violence: predatory/planned and impulsive/reactive (Amman et al. 2017;

Deisinger and Randazzo 2017). Predatory/planned violence is premeditated, often emotionless, and serves a purpose or goal. Perpetrators of this kind of violence are individuals who often have grievances, are attack oriented, and do not have a time limit on their actions (i.e., their planning takes place over time). Impulsive/reactive violence, on the other hand, is emotional, impromptu, and frequently a defensive behavior in response to a perceived imminent threat. These behaviors are time-limited. If the perceived threat or emotion is eliminated, then the risk of violence is reduced. The actions of adolescent and adult mass murders can typically be classified as predatory/planned violence (Meloy et al. 2011).

6.1 MOTIVE FOR VIOLENCE OR THREAT

What is motivating the subject to make the threats or engage in the behaviors that have raised the level of concern to make them the subject of a threat assessment?

Risk Indicators:

Statements or observed behaviors that indicate the subject is seeking to address a grievance or injustice through violent means. The subject sees violence as a legitimate option to achieving their goal. Their goal may also include end pain, gain notoriety, restore dignity or self-worth, and or revenge/retribution for a perceived wrong done to them.

Possible lines of inquiry:

- What is the subject's motivation that lead to their threatening behavior or statements?

- Does he have a major grievance or grudge? Against whom?

- Does the situation or circumstance that led to these statements or actions still exist?

- Does the subject feel unfairly threatened or wounded by someone or by an institution?

- What does the subject want, or goal?

- Does the subject see violence as an acceptable means to an end? Their end or goal?

- Does he feel that any part of the problem is resolved or see any alternatives?

Risk Rubric:

1. Motive for violence or threat		
Absent/Mild	Moderate	Severe
Subject is not motivated by violence to address a perceived grievance, or the subject has a grievance but does not see violence as an acceptable response.	Subject has a perceived grievance or other motivating factor and possibly contemplating violence.	Subject has a perceived grievance or other motivating factor and sees violence as a desirable option to resolve issue.

6.2   EXPRESSED INTENT TO ATTACK

What, if anything, has the subject communicated to someone else (targets, friends, other subjects/co-workers, teachers, family, others) or written in a diary, journal, or website concerning his or her ideas and/or intentions?

Risk Indicators:

Any specific plans, threats, or expressed intentions to harm individuals at their school/workplace. Many individuals who engage in targeted violence do not direct threats to their targets, but communicate their ideas, plans, or intentions to others. Some also keep journals or diaries recording their thoughts and behaviors. Collateral informants (family, friends, caregivers, and co-workers) should be questioned about any unusual or inappropriate ideas and any signs of the subject's desperation or deterioration. (Borum)

Possible lines of inquiry:

- What are the subject's words, writings, or social media say about their intention to do harm to others?

- Does the subject's words, writings, or social media point to specific planning to do harm to others?

- Does the subject's words, writings, or social media indicate a time frame within they want/need to do harm to others?

Risk Rubric:

2. Expressed intent to attack		
Absent/Mild	Moderate	Severe
Subject has not communicated a desire to hurt others. No homicidal intent.	Violent threats (regardless of condition) are expressed with little or no contrition. Homicide is considered or expressed.	Threats are violent with homicidal intent: direct, repeated, with details; possibly with time frame.

6.3   VIOLENT FANTASIES OR HOMICIDAL IDEAS

Does the subject have a preoccupation with violent themes, fantasies, weapons, or do they identify or have a fascination with perpetrators of violence (past active shooters)? Are any of their violent fantasies directed toward the school/organization or subjects/co-workers?

Risk Indicators:

Subject entertains thoughts of violence towards the school/organization in general or towards specific individuals they know. Subject has a preoccupation with past active shooters or other perpetrators of mass violence.

Possible lines of inquiry:

- Does the subject introduce violent themes into school/organizational projects where violence is unrelated to the subject matter?

- Does the subject share their violent idea/fantasies with friends and acquaintances?

- Does the subject's writes or drawings contain homicidal or violent imagery?

- Does the subject have an unhealthy preoccupation on violent music, movies, video games, or websites?

- Does the subject collect information or images of past active/school shooters or other perpetrators of mass violence?

Risk Rubric:

3. Violent fantasies or homicidal ideas		
Absent/Mild	Moderate	Severe
No evidence of violent fantasies, or preoccupation with other violent themes.	Subject is preoccupied with thoughts or expressions of violent themes in their life. Unhealthy interest in past perpetrators of mass violence and/or weapons.	Subject is obsessed with violent themes, past perpetrators of mass violence. Intense fascination with weapons.

6.4   Pʀᴇ-Aᴛᴛᴀᴄᴋ Bᴇʜᴀᴠɪᴏʀs

Has the subject engaged in pre-attack behaviors necessary to carry out their attack?

Risk Indicators:

Subject has moved past violent ideas and has started making physical preparations to carry out a violent act: planning and/or practice; increased weapons acquisition; access to potential targets; research to increase knowledge of targets' whereabouts; or actions to increase access to targets. Pre-attack behaviors may accelerate in frequency leading up to an attack (Energy burst warning behavior).

Possible lines of inquiry:

- Is there physical evidence that the subject is actually preparing for an attack?

- Written plans or timetable;

  o Internet searches for target intelligence or attack methods;

  o attempt to acquire or successful acquisition of weapons; or

  o gathering of costume/tactical clothing.

- Has the subject tried to recruit others to help him?

- Has the subject tried to penetrate or test security (dry run)?

- Has the subject engaged in stalking or harassing behavior towards the target individual?

- Is there a decline in their usual routines or responsibilities, such as going to work, clubs, or sport practice?

Risk Rubric:

4. Pre-Attack Behaviors		
Absent/Mild	Moderate	Severe
No evidence of planning or preparations for violence.	Evidence of some planning or preparations for violence.	Evidence or weapon acquisition, tactical preparation, or accelerated preparation activity.

6.5 MEANS AND ACCESS

Does the subject have the capacity/cognitive sophistication to carry out an act of targeted violence?

Risk Indicators:

The subject has the mental capacity and cognitive ability to organized and sufficient to carry out an act of targeted violence.

Counter Indicators:

Acting out or making a violent statement has been identified by a mental health professional as a manifestation of their special needs diagnosis. The subject does not have the cognitive ability to carry out an attack.

Possible lines of inquiry:

- How organized is the subject's thinking and behavior?

- Does the subject have the means, e.g., access to a weapon, to carry out an attack?

- Based on the subject's baseline behavior or cognitive abilities, are they capable of carrying out a targeted act of violence?

Risk Rubric:

5. Means and Access		
Absent		Present
Subject does not have the cognitive capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence, or access to weapons.		Subject has the cognitive capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence and has access to weapons.

6.6   HOPELESSNESS, PERSONAL STRESS, AND NEGATIVE COPING

Has the subject experienced a recent loss and or loss of status, and has this led to feelings of desperation and despair?

Risk Indicators:

The subject has experienced significant losses in the following areas: material (treasured object); relational (death or separation of close relationship); or losses of status (narcissistic injury). Potential losses can be examined in at least four domains: family relations, intimate/peer relations, occupational, and self-image/status. The subject expresses a sense of hopelessness/desperation and may consider suicide as a means of elevating their pain. Subject demonstrates inability to cope with stressors in their life. (Borum)

Possible lines of inquiry:

- Is there information to suggest that the subject is experiencing desperation and/or despair?

- Has the subject experienced a recent failure, loss and/or loss of status?

- Is the subject known to be having difficulty coping with a stressful event?

- Is the subject now, or has the subject ever been, suicidal or "accident-prone"?

- Has the subject engaged in behavior that suggests that he or she has considered ending their life?

Risk Rubric:

6. Hopelessness, loss, and negative coping		
Absent/Mild	Moderate	Severe
Subject has not experienced extraordinary loss or setback that has caused a crisis and shows some positive coping skills.	Subject has recently experienced or anticipates experiencing a moderate loss or setback. Although stressed, shows some coping strategies.	Subject has recently experienced or anticipates experiencing a serious and significant loss or setback. Subject shows little to no coping strategies.

6.7   ANGER

Is the subject displaying uncontrollable outburst of anger, belligerence, or bullying that is causing concern or fear in others? Has the intensity and frequency of the displays of anger increased?

Risk Indicators:

Angry and impulsive reactions to frustrations coupled with physical displays of danger, e.g., throwing objects, vandalism, bullying, intimidation, and fighting, which cause fear and concern in others. Subject's displays of anger are increasing in intensity and frequency.

Possible lines of inquiry:

- Does the subject have angry outbursts?

- What is their intensity? What is their frequency?

- Has the intensity or frequency changed? Increased or decreased?

- Does the subject react inappropriately frustrated to situations?

- Has the subject acted out in physical displays of anger, e.g., throwing objects, vandalism?

- Has the subject shown a pattern of bullying, intimidation, and/or fighting?

Risk Rubric:

7. Anger		
Absent/Mild	Moderate	Severe
Subject's outbursts are minor in intensity and frequency. Subject takes responsibility for behavior and acknowledges other's feelings. Others have not expressed fear or concern.	Subject has regular angry outbursts. Subject throws objects, bullies, and/or intimidates others. Subject takes little or no responsibility for behavior and its impact on others. Others report fear or concern.	Subject demonstrates frequent and/or intense outbursts of anger that are often manifested in physically though bullying, intimidation, vandalism, and fighting. Fear and concern is reported by others.

6.8   SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Does the subject abuse any substances, and is violence or anger associated with their substance abuse?

Risk Indicators:

The subject has either self-identified as a substance abuser or has exhibited signs of intoxication. The subject has history of anger or violence associated with alcohol or drug dependency problem.

Possible lines of inquiry:

- •   Is there any direct or indirect evidence that the subject is abusing drugs or alcohol?

- •   Does the subject have a history of violence or physical displays of anger associated with alcohol or drug use?

- •   Has the subject ever shown up for work or school while under the influence of drugs or alcohol?

Risk Rubric:

8. Substance abuse		
Absent/Mild	Moderate	Severe
No indication that subject has a current or recent substance abuse problem.	Pattern of substance abuse is present with noted changes in behavior, mood, and conduct. (or) Sub has shown up for work/school at least one time under the influence of alcohol or drugs.	Subject's substance abuse is causing major problem in sub's impulse control, and is acting out violently as a result of their substance abuse.

6.9 HISTORY OF VIOLENCE AND CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Does the subject have a history or violence or criminal activity?

Risk Indicators:

Subject has a history of violence; frequent or severe. Subject has engaged in criminal activity; violent or nonviolent crime. Displays outward antagonism and towards authority figures.

Possible lines of inquiry:

- Does the subject have a school/organization discipline record of violence or criminal activity?

- Has the subject ever been arrested or detained for criminal activity? Are there calls for service to the subject's home?

- When was the last recorded act of violence or criminal activity? Does the subject have a school/organization discipline record of violence or criminal activity?

- Is the subject honest about their past acts? Does the subject show remorse?

Risk Rubric:

9. History of violence and criminal activity		
Absent/Mild	Moderate	Severe
Subject does not have a history of violence or criminal activity. (or) Subject has had one violent act or crime in their past, but no other issues of concern in the recent past.	Subject has had one or two acts of violence or criminality in the recent past so recent to indicate that is an ongoing issue that has not resolved. Sub is antagonistic towards authority figures.	Subject has had one or more serious acts of violence and/or criminal acts in their recent past that indicate a pattern of conflict with authorities.

6.10 I*NHIBITORS AGAINST VIOLENCE*

Does the subject have positive attitudes, attachments, supportive family structure, respect for others, positive life goals, and coping/problem solving skills that inhibit violent acts?

Risk Inhibitors:

Subject demonstrates resiliency and limit-setting that is derived from positive attitudes, pro-social attachments, supportive family structure, peer support, respect for others, respect for authority figures, and positive life goals.

- Possible lines of inquiry: How does the subject respond to adversity in their life?

- What is the subject's attitude towards authority figures?

- Does the subject have long term life goals? Does the subject "see" themselves achieving these goals?

- Does the subject have positive peer relationships?

- Does the subject have a positive relationship with at least one adult?

- What is the subject's genuine remorse for fear inducing behavior?

- Does the subject seek out appropriate help for their problems?

Risk Rubric:

10. Inhibitors against violence		
Strong	Moderate	Absent
Strong positive attitudes, attachments, supportive family structure, respect for others, positive life goals, and coping/problem solving skills. Seeks sources for help. Has long term life goals.	Subject has supportive family or peer structures. Responds to limit-setting techniques. Seeks sources for help.	Absent positive attitudes, attachments, supportive family structure, respect for others, does not seek sources for help. Does not have long term life goals. Not concerned with consequences for conduct.

7 CATEGORY RISK SCALE

Experts recommend categorical rather than probabilistic systems for communicating the results of risk assessments. This five-category system for describing violence risk potential can guide the construction of action steps appropriate to the level of risk. The Risk Investigation Model (Hatcher, 1994, 1995, 1996) recognizes that risk behavior does not fall into two simple categories of violent versus non-violent, but rather extends across a continuum. These categories are a useful way of describing and communicating (not diagnosing) the results of risk and threat assessments at different phases of the process. For example, as information is initially presented to team members, it may be helpful to hypothesize what the level of risk may be, so that initial precaution may be taken. (Mohandie, 2002)

7.1 CATEGORY 1

An individual is, or is very close to, behaving in a way that is, potentially dangerous to self or others. Examples include detailed threats of lethal violence, suicide threats, possession/use of firearms or other weapons, serious physical fighting, etc. Most of these individuals will qualify for immediate hospitalization or arrest.

In the Category 1 situation, the individual is imminently dangerous to self or others and qualifies for immediate hospitalization or arrest. In a composite case example, two high school subjects have been dating throughout their high school years, but the female-half has broken off the relationship anticipating moving away to college. The male-half has taken the rejection very hard and has started to display stalking type behavior. The parents of the female-half found a kind of suicide note from their daughter's ex-boyfriend, left on their front door. The ex-boyfriend was contacted at school with a loaded gun in his backpack and a journal detailing how he planned to kill his ex-girlfriend on the last day of school and then kill himself. These types of cases, although very serious in nature, are very clear in presenting an associated crime or grounds for a mental health commitment. (Mohandie, 2002)

7.2 CATEGORY 2

An individual has displayed significant signs of Warning Behaviors, has significant stress and/or precipitating events, and has few inhibitors, coping skills or stabilizing Factors. May not qualify for hospitalization or arrest at present but requires referrals for needed services and active case management.

Category 2 cases involve individuals who displayed high violence potential but do not qualify for arrest or hospitalization. In the Category 2 situation, the threat of violence has a qualification or condition associated with the threat. This means that the individual is going to hurt someone if some designated or inferred event in the future does happen or does not happen. In this circumstance, the reported behavior of the subject, employee, or other person, while of serious concern to administrative personnel, is not reasonably likely to qualify for immediate arrest or

involuntary psychiatric hospitalization. For example, a long-term disabled school employee anticipating his upcoming disability pension hearing states, "If they decide against me, I know where they live and I will teach them a lesson." He then embarks upon extensive discussions with others about his violent fantasies, his detailed knowledge of their personal addresses and driving habits, and his past military training in surveillance and firearms. (Mohandie, 2002)

Category 2 cases present a significant challenge to administrative personnel, law enforcement, and mental health professionals. In this category, the threat may or may not be explicit. An individual may make a threat and/or pose a threat for future harm (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998; Gelles, Fein, & Sasaki, 1998; Macdonald, 1968). Risk assessment specialists, particularly mental health consultants, play a critical role in distinguishing Category 1 from Category 2 cases, evaluating the level of risk to self and others as indicated by the subject or employee's actions, and assessing options for continued school/workplace safety. (Mohandie, 2002)

7.3 CATEGORY 3

An individual has displayed some Warning Behaviors and may be experiencing stress or recent Precipitating Events, but also may have some inhibitors and stabilizing factors. There may be evidence of internal emotional distress (depression, social withdrawal, etc.) or of intentional infliction of distress on others (bullying, intimidation, seeking to cause fear, etc.).

Category 3 is defined as insufficient evidence for violence potential, but sufficient evidence for the repetitive and/or intentional infliction of emotional distress upon others. In the Category 3 situation, it is the threat of violence rather than the act of violence that is important. The threat of violence or other behaviors are intended to cause other subjects, co-workers, administrators, and/or others sufficient distress so that no interpersonal and/or school action will occur that would be averse to the individual making the threat. These cases often involve intimidators who are extremely effective at making others take notice of their concerns. They believe that they are entitled to do so and will often acknowledge to others that this was their intended goal, a goal that they will often perceive as justified. An example is the subject who regularly bullies his classmates when he feels like they have not given him an appropriate degree of respect, angrily and abusively berating their personality ("You are a punk and a loser!"), using ambiguous and not so-ambiguous threatening language ("I could kick your ass" or "I'm gonna mess you up!"). While the bully denies that he would ever get violent, he is very effective at getting others to "walk on eggshells" to appease him. The Category 3 description also applies when the person denies any intention to cause distress, but the behavior is repetitive across time, and sufficient to cause distress in coworkers, classmates, and others. Many times, the person fails to respond to limit-setting by district personnel. (Mohandie, 2002)

7.4 CATEGORY 4

An individual has displayed minor Warning Behaviors, but assessment reveals little history of serious risk factors or dangerous behavior. Inhibitors and stabilizing factors appear to be

reasonably well-established. There may be evidence of the unintentional infliction of distress on others (insensitive remarks, "teasing" taken too far, etc.).

Category 4 cases have insufficient evidence of violence potential, but sufficient evidence for the unintentional infliction of emotional distress upon others. In the Category 4 situation, the threat of violence occurs and could reasonably cause emotional distress in other classmates/employees. The individual makes a single threat or threatening behavior, but does not have the intent or motive to cause emotional distress in other subjects, co-workers, supervisors, or others. Subsequently, the individual is able to acknowledge the reasonable impact of his/her behavior upon the emotional health and welfare of the targeted people. The subject further acknowledges and endorses the school/organization's code of conduct that such behavior is unacceptable. S/he promises it will not occur again. For example, a high school junior joked to another subject about how a "Columbine type shooting might liven up their school's first fall dance" as he was complaining about the "brainless jocks." This other subject, concerned about this statement of a recent shooting, did the right thing and told a teacher who intervened and referred the boy to the assistant principal. The assistant principal convened a threat assessment team. Upon the STAT recommendation, she made arrangements for an interview of the subject with security present. The teenager acknowledged making the statement, felt bad that he had caused others to become upset, admitted that it was in bad taste, and said he would apologize to put people at ease. When his mother, a single parent, was notified about the incident, she attended a school conference. Campus police officer searched the boy's room, found no weapons or anything else to lend credibility to the statement. (Mohandie, 2002)

7.5   CATEGORY 5

Upon assessment it appears there is insufficient evidence for any risk for harm. Situations under this category can include misunderstandings, poor decision-making, false accusations from peers (seeking to get other peers in trouble), etc.

In the Category 5 situation, insufficient evident is present for either violence potential or the infliction of emotional distress. This category indicates an unfounded allegation of violent threat by another subject or co-worker(s) for unknown reasons. In one case, a teacher was referred to the police and an *ad hoc* school based threat assessment team after she accused subjects of attacking her and dousing her with fecal matter. After an investigation, it was determined that she had concocted the story, and she was charged and convicted of filing a false police report (Leonard, 1998). (Mohandie, 2002)

8   STEP 4 – MANAGING A SERIOUS SUBSTANTIVE THREAT

Step 4 is undertaken for all Category 1 or 2 subjects. In addition to the protective actions taken at Step 3, the STAT team will take three additional actions:

First, the subject will be screened for mental health services or counseling. This typically involves interviews by a mental health professional with the goal of determining whether the subject needs mental health services and to understand what conflict or problem underlies the threat.

Second, there is a law enforcement investigation of the case. This investigation will look for evidence of planning and preparation, to determine whether a crime has been committed, and assess what additional protective actions might be needed.

The third action is to integrate findings from the mental health assessment and law enforcement investigation into a safety plan. The subject might be suspended from their school/organization for several days until this plan can be formulated. The safety plan determines the conditions under which the subject can return to school/organization or have a change in placement.

9   STEP 5 – IMPLEMENT A SAFETY PLAN

A safety plan has three main objectives: (1) to resolve the threat of violence so as to maintain the safety of any potential victims; (2) to address any factors in the school/organization environment (such as bullying or peer conflict) that played a contributory role in the threat situation; and (3) to return the subject to school or an alternative educational program.

A. Complete a written plan. The STAT team should meet to share information and develop a common understanding of the threat. The team's plan should include the immediate steps taken to prevent the threat from being carried out and a plan for further action. Ordinarily these actions would include conditions under which the subject could return to school/organization, or continue in an alternative educational setting, and any interventions such as counseling or mediation that are deemed appropriate. The results of this meeting will be summarized in a short Safety Evaluation Report, which should be placed in a confidential section of the subject's file.

A written plan is recommended for three reasons: (I) to establish clearly what has been decided and how the plan will be carried out; (2) to provide adequate legal record of a responsible and appropriate response to the threat; and (3) to provide information for school/organization staff in the event of another incident or threatening situation in another grade or a different school/organization.

B. Maintain contact with the subject. Every safety plan should include provision for follow-up contact with the subject to verify that the plan has been successfully implemented to meet the school's safety needs and the needs of the subject. For example, if the subject's threat was a reaction to bullying by another subject, there will be regular contact with the subject to assess whether any bullying has occurred. The safety plan will specify the individual or individuals responsible for follow-up contacts.

C. Revise the plan as needed. The team should continue to monitor the situation after the subject returns to school and make any changes in the plan that seem reasonable to maintain safety. Safety plans should include provision for a follow-up review of the subject's behavior and attitude toward the intended victim of the threat. If there is indication that the subject is still at risk to carry out the threat, the plan should be revised accordingly.

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11 BEHAVIORAL THREAT MANAGEMENT AND ASSESSMENT WORKSHEETS

The following attached worksheets are to be used in the Behavioral Threat Management and Assessment process.

- Behavioral Incident Form
- Behavioral Threat Assessment Worksheet
- Student Safety Management Form
- Plan to Protect Targeted or Victimized Subject
- Parent/Guardian Interview