



PROCEDURE

Title: **VIOLENCE THREAT RISK
ASSESSMENT: SCHOOL RESPONSE
TO THREATENING BEHAVIOURS**

Procedure No.: **4008g**
Effective Date: **2013 September 10**

Department: **Learning Support Services**

Reference(s): *Safe Schools Act, 2006*
Safe School Policy (4008a)
Police/School Board Protocol (4008e)
Emergency Procedure- Operations (4001)
Safe School – Suspension of Students (4003)
Traumatic Events Response Team Procedure (9005)
Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145
Risk of Violence Assessment Procedure (5014)
Community Threat Assessment Protocol: Collaborative Approach
Assessing and Responding to Potential Violence
Caring and Safe Schools in Ontario
Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response
(CCTATR)
Violence Threat Risk Assessment Level One and Two Training,
Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of the *Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA): School Response to Threatening Behaviours procedure* is to provide the framework for a school response to threat-making behaviours in school. The goal is to broaden system capacity to respond to threats of violence, and to remove or reduce, as far as possible, any threats to the safety of students, parents/guardians, school staff, the school or other buildings.

It is the responsibility of all in the school setting to respond to threats and to follow-up with appropriate reporting, information gathering and, where indicated, intervention. From time to time a student may make threats towards individual students, groups of students, teachers, others or to whole schools. The threats may be verbal, written, drawn or delivered indirectly through electronic means. At times a threat may not present a substantive or credible risk but at other times, the threat may pose an immediate and/or serious risk of harm to others. All school administrators are required to develop plans and introduce measures to create caring and safe schools.

Threat assessment is a process of determining if a threat maker actually poses a risk to the target(s) being threatened. The key principles in risk/threat assessment are:

Administered By:	Learning Support Services
Amendment Date(s):	2018 December 18

- The sharing of relevant information on a proactive basis to avert or minimize dangers that affect the health and safety of any person;
- Fostering open communication with relevant team members. **Working in isolation is a risk;**
- Determining the level of concern in a timely manner, usually within the same day, to identify next steps in the response plan. **All threats should receive a response;**
- Investigating the mindset of the person making the threat with a thoughtful probing viewing of information and paying attention to key points about pre-attack or baseline behaviour;
- Maintaining an objective, fact-finding approach to avoid misguided assumptions based on subjective impressions and hearsay.

Along with early intervention measures, this procedure supports proactive planning to support traumatic events and reflects safe, caring and restorative approaches. The evidence indicates that all threats warrant some degree of investigation and follow-up. Where threats have not been investigated and concerning signs not followed up, there have been tragic consequences.

1.1 Definition of a Threat

The Threat Assessment (TA) is a process to determine if the threat-maker poses a risk to the target(s) being threatened. Threats can be:

- **Direct:** A threat that identifies a specific act against a specific target and is delivered in a straightforward, clear and explicit manner (ie. “I am going to stab Jason in the cafeteria at lunch.”);
- **Indirect:** A threat that tends to be vague, unclear or ambiguous (ie. “I could kill you, I could kill everyone in this school.”);
- **Veiled:** A threat that strongly implies, but does not explicitly threatened violence (i.e., “My life would be better if you weren’t around.”);
- **Conditional:** A threat that warns that a violent act will happen unless certain terms are met (i.e., “If you don’t give me the money you owe me, I am going to shoot you.”).

Cameron and Sawyer (2000) state that threats include but are not limited to:

- Possession of weapons;
- Bomb threats;
- Verbal/written threats to kill or injure others;
- Internet website, emailed, text-messaged threats to kill or injure others;
- Threats may be written, verbal, drawn, posted on the internet or made by gesture only and ...may be direct, indirect, conditional or veiled. (p.4)

1.2 Why VTRA?

Research and information gathered from inquests and reports in the aftermath of mass shootings at schools and colleges (Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response [CCTATR]):

- Incidents of targeted violence at school rarely are sudden, impulsive acts. Violence is evolutionary. It is a myth that a person “just snaps”;
- Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker’s idea and/or plan to attack. The perpetrator had often shared a plan with a peer;
- Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing their attack;
- There is no accurate or useful “profile” of students who engage in targeted school violence;
- Most attackers engaged in some behaviour, prior to the incident, that caused others concern or indicated a need for help. Threat making can often be viewed as a cry for help;
- Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Many had considered or attempted suicide. Suicidal and homicidal thinking occurring together indicates a significant risk;
- Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack;
- Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack;
- In many cases, other students were involved in the attack in some capacity;
- Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most attacks were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention and most were brief in duration.

2.0 The Nature of Threat Related Behaviour

Baseline Behaviours: Behavioural tracking is the method used to formally determine baseline behaviour functioning. To determine baseline behaviour, ask the question, “Is this behaviour typical for this individual?” If the behaviour is typical, then that serves as the baseline for future reference. If the behaviour is not typical, or a deviation from a previously identified behaviour is observed, then evolution can be inferred.

Worrisome Behaviours: The majority of threat-related behaviours can be categorized as worrisome behaviour. Worrisome behaviours are those that cause concern for members of the school or community system that may indicate that a student is moving toward a risk of serious violent behaviour. This may include instances where a student may be engaging in behaviour such as drawing pictures, writing stories or making vague statements that do not, in and of themselves, constitute “uttering threats,” as defined by law but are causing concern for some members of the school community because of their violent content. Identifying and following up on worrisome behaviours results in earlier interventions. Violence can be prevented through early recognition of worrisome behaviours and the development of an intervention plan to address these behaviours and reduce the risk that they will escalate to the point of threats and/or violence. Typically, a threat assessment would not be undertaken to address worrisome behaviours. Rather, a multi-disciplinary intervention plan should be developed so it can be put in place for the student, before these behaviours warrant a threat assessment.

3.0 Preliminary Investigation and Determining Level of Risk

The Principal (“Principal” refers to Principal or designate) upon receiving a report will, as soon as possible, conduct a preliminary investigation to clarify details about the incident by interviewing (where possible) the student who has made the threat, any potential or actual victims and any bystanders or witnesses with material information. A decision will be made as to which of the following categories the incident falls into:

Call 911 if there is imminent danger or the threat is time sensitive and needs an immediate action/response.

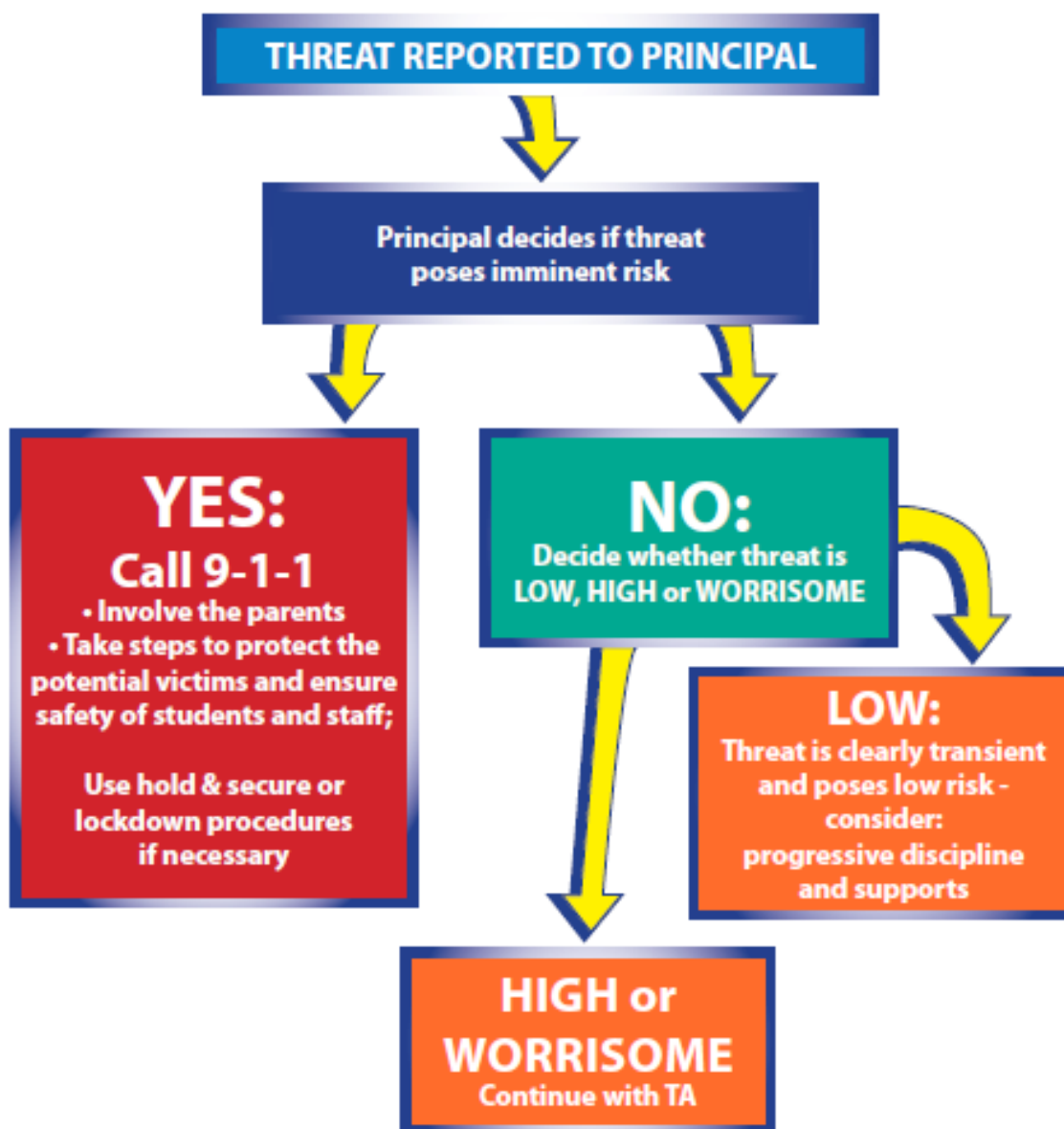
Imminent risk (immediate threat, e.g. student has weapon in possession)

- Principal contacts police immediately (**CALL 9-1-1**);
- Use hold and secure/lockdown procedures as appropriate;
- Do not proceed with Stage 1 Threat Assessment until the immediate safety of all has been addressed. The Board VTRA lead (Superintendent of Student Achievement, Safe Schools) should be contacted at this stage.

High risk (e.g. threatens – Section 264.1 Criminal code)

- Principal contacts police (if available use the officer assigned to the school);
- Principal continues to gather further information about the incident and the student.

This decision process is represented in the following flow chart:



CONTACTING THE POLICE

If the threat or violent behaviour is deemed significant by school administrator or serious enough to warrant charges, contacting local police is recommended (even for students under 12 years of age).

Note: School administrators need to follow mandatory police reporting requirements under the Safe Schools Act and the Police-School Board Protocol.

Note: victims may independently pursue charges even if not recommended by the school.

4.0 Stage One of Investigation – Internal

Stage **one** is an in-school response involving a number of steps as outlined below. In the case where the Principal's decision is that the situation is High Risk, the Principal will convene an emergency team of relevant personnel who comprise the Threat Assessment Team. Team members should include: a school administrator, a staff member who knows the student well, learning support/student success teacher, psychological services staff, social work/counselling staff, and, if available, a police services liaison officer.

The Principal will notify the Superintendent of Student Achievement for the school and the Superintendent of Student Achievement, Safe Schools, that a Threat Assessment is being conducted.

The School Threat Assessment team must include at least one individual with Level 1 Threat Assessment Training from the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response.

The Principal will notify the parents/guardians of the incident and that further investigation is continuing in accordance with the procedures outlined in the "Fair Notice" section of the procedure.

It is the responsibility of the Threat Assessment Team to continue to gather information, using the Stage One Report Form (Appendix A). This assessment should follow the steps outlined in the CCTATR workbook. Upon completion, the Stage One Report Form (Appendix A) should be filed in the VTRA file in the office of the Principal, NOT in the OSR. A copy must be sent to the Superintendent of Student Achievement of the school and the Superintendent Student Achievement, Safe Schools. The TVDSB VTRA Form (Appendix C) should be completed and filed in the student's OSR.

Based on the information gathered and the determination of level of risk, the Principal, in consultation with the team, and with direction from the Superintendent of Student Achievement, Safe Schools, will develop a **Stage One Intervention Plan (Appendix B)** which may involve a number of different possible elements including school safety and behavioural planning, further assessment, parent engagement, police involvement, community agency referral, and progressive discipline. Upon completion, the **Stage One Intervention Plan (Appendix B)** should be filed in the VTRA file in the office of the Principal. A copy must be sent to the Superintendent of Student Achievement of the school and the Superintendent Student Achievement, Safe Schools.

Note: All forms are found in Electronic Forms.

Please see section 7.0 Special Considerations for specific information regarding threat assessment and suspension.

5.0 Stage Two of the Investigation: School and Community

If indicated by the information gathered, a more comprehensive threat/risk assessment may be required. This is referred to as a **Stage Two VTRA** and involves a larger group who have more specialized training referred to as the Community Threat Risk

Assessment and Intervention Team (CTRAIT). It also involves accessing community supports when the school team at Stage One decides that they need more help in determining level of risk and when members agree that the level of risk is high (see: *Community Threat Assessment Protocol: Collaborative Approach to Assessing and Responding to Potential Violence*).

The Principal will contact the TVDSB VTRA Lead (Superintendent of Student Achievement, Safe Schools) for direction regarding next steps.

The steps that may be taken in Stage Two are flexible, possibly including the following:

- Contacting community members who have received Threat Assessment Training from the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response;
- Review of available information and any gaps and make a decision to obtain more complete or more detailed information on the areas of concern such as risks or worrisome behaviours identified in Stage One;
- Efforts to engage the parents/guardians in a collaborative way to address the concerns and to collaborate with them in finding solutions;
- Involvement of police and community agencies to develop a safety and/or treatment plan. (Note that while legislation permits the disclosure of information where there is imminent danger, there may be circumstances where consent to release information is an issue).

6.0 Communication

Safe schools are schools that promote open communication in a culture of information sharing and reporting of concerns. Administrators, teachers, school support staff, students and parents/guardians must have the support to openly voice concern about school safety.

Fair Notice: Schools will share information regarding *Fair Notice* to the community at the commencement of the school year informing parents/guardians of the threat assessment protocol.

School and Community Threat/Risk Assessment Protocol: School and Community Threat Assessment Protocol has been adopted by the Thames Valley District School Board and the London District Catholic School Board in collaboration with community agencies in Elgin, Oxford and London/Middlesex, which recognizes that there is a mutual and broad community responsibility to maintain safety and to prevent violent occurrences. A copy of the ***Community Threat Assessment Protocol*** can be found on the Board's website.

Communication with the Media: Administrators will consult with the Communications Officer and the affiliate Superintendent before engaging with the media. A communication plan may be developed to share information with students, staff and parents/guardians. The Board will generally take the lead role in managing the media, particularly when there is involvement of a community partner(s) in the evaluation of the threat.

7.0 Special Considerations

7.1 Threat Assessment and Suspension

A poorly timed out-of-school suspension may increase the risk of violence, as it may be viewed by the student as “the last straw.” Although the suspension does not cause the violence, it may create a context for high-risk students to take the step from planning to action. Therefore, unless the threat maker already poses an imminent or obvious safety concern, it is recommended that the VTRA team be activated, where possible, before a suspension is imposed. The Stage 1 team is activated and the Stage 1 Report Form data is collected within reason before a suspension is even considered. **Threat/Risk Assessment is not a disciplinary measure.**

7.2 Students with Special Needs

In accordance with the Education Act, a Principal must consider “mitigating factors” when considering when to hold a student responsible for a violation of the Board Code of Conduct. These include whether the student has the ability to control their behaviour and whether they have the ability to see the foreseeable consequences of their behaviour. The VTRA protocol will not be activated when students with special needs engage in threat making or aggressive behaviours that are typical of the “baseline.” If the student with special needs goes beyond their typical baseline behaviour, the VTRA process should be initiated.

7.3 Suicidal Ideation

If the threat indicates suicidal ideation or the level of risk for suicide is high, refer to the Response to Risk of Student Suicide procedure.

7.4 Students of Culturally Diverse Populations

The potential for cultural bias is well-documented in literature.

Members of some minority cultures experience significant rates of poverty, racism and discrimination; language barriers might also exist. These factors, along with potential distrust for authority figures may lead to the presence of multiple stressors that may increase the perceived level of risk or actual risk.

When language barriers exist it is vital, if possible, that respondents speak in their first language and that a neutral interpreter be used to translate. Similarly, it is vital that the individuals involved in the VTRA are familiar with the cultural backgrounds of all parties being interviewed and whenever possible at least one member of the team is the identified specialist in that area. If there are no VTRA team members knowledgeable of a particular culture or language, then an untrained staff member or other professional may, with consent, be brought in as a consultant to the team. Ideally, one member of the VTRA team is of the same cultural background as respondents from ethnic minorities.

7.5 Other Diverse Populations

The Thames Valley District School Board recognizes that groups in our communities face systemic and individual biases that may be related to race, colour, culture, ethnicity, linguistic origin, disability, socio-economic class, age, ancestry, nationality, place of origin, religion, faith, sex, gender, sexual orientation, family status, and/or marital status. As the original peoples of Canada, First Nations, Metis and Inuit community face similar and unique biases. To the extent that the Thames Valley District School board recognizes that these biases exist within the school system, it is committed to fairness, equity, and inclusive education and principles of the system.

As with students of culturally diverse populations, it is vital that the individual involved in the VTRA is familiar with the background of the parties being interviewed, and sensitive to the nature of the diversity.