

## STUDENT THREAT ASSESSMENT

### Overview for school staff

This year, we will be using a standard procedure for responding to student threats of violence called "threat assessment." Threat assessment was recommended by the FBI and by the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education in their studies of school violence. Threat assessment guidelines were developed and field-tested at the University of Virginia, and they have been adopted for use by hundreds of schools.

The basic idea is that, when a student communicates a threat to harm someone, the threat assessment team will determine how serious the threat is and what can be done to prevent the threat from being carried out. In most cases of school shootings, the student communicates a threat before taking action, and, if these threats can be identified, violence can be prevented. However, it is important not to treat all threats the same way, because most threatening statements made by students are not serious threats. The job of the threat assessment team is to determine how serious the threat is and how to respond to it. The team will investigate threats, quickly resolve the "transient" threats, and take further action to deal with the "substantive" threats. Research has shown that the vast majority of threats can be resolved safely and without drastic consequences such as school expulsion.

It is important to remember that it is highly unlikely that a student will carry out a threat to commit a homicide (national statistics show that the odds are no greater than 1 in 3 million that a student will be a victim of a homicide at school and that the average school can expect a student-perpetrated homicide only once every 12,800 years). In most cases, threats are a sign that a student is frustrated, angry, and needs help resolving a problem. A goal of threat assessment is to address this underlying problem.

*If you know of a student who has made a threat, it is important to contact the school's threat assessment team.*

**What is a threat?** A threat is any expression of an intent to harm someone. Threats may be spoken, written, or expressed in some other way, such as through gestures. Threats may be direct ("I am going to beat you up") or indirect ("Watch me beat him up after school"). A threat can be vague ("I'm going to hurt him") or implied ("You better watch out"). Possession of a weapon will be investigated as a possible threat.

**What should I tell my students?** Students are often reluctant to tell us about threats, because they don't want to be considered "snitches." We must teach students the difference between snitching and seeking help to prevent an act of violence. We must let students know we are always available to hear their concerns.

**Who's on the team?** See the attached information on team members.