

Threat Assessment and Reporting Resources for K-12 Schools

Targeted school violence is preventable.

While there is no one profile for an attacker or a school at risk of attack, a threat assessment program can help school officials identify potential threats or safety concerns, assess the risk associated with these threats, and develop and implement actions to intervene. A bystander reporting program is another critical component of school safety that provides students and other school community members a way to notify designated school officials of concerns they may have for the safety of themselves or others.

Research shows that students who have planned or carried out attacks at school often displayed concerning observable behaviors. According to a [study](#) conducted by the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) of 67 averted plots to commit school violence, 94 percent of attackers told a classmate or someone within their school about their plans for violence prior to taking action. In a [different study of completed school attacks](#), NTAC researchers found that in two-thirds of these tragedies, there was at least one communication (or other observed concerning behavior) that was not reported by the bystander who observed it.

[Behavioral threat assessment](#) is a proactive approach to identify, assess, and provide appropriate interventions and resources for students who display behavior that elicits concern for the safety of themselves or others. It is not a criminal investigation, a checklist, or a disciplinary process. Rather, threat assessments offer schools a method to understand the whole picture surrounding a wide range of potentially violent situations and craft a plan to intervene appropriately.

A threat assessment and reporting program can be a key component of creating a safe school environment as well as supporting student health. It works in tandem with other strategies, like bullying prevention and mental health support, to build a comprehensive approach to violence prevention and school safety.



Did you know? The threat assessment model [originated from the U.S. Secret Service](#) to identify individuals who could be a threat to the president. The model has since been adapted to prevent attacks and identify threats in various communities across the country.

Building a Threat Assessment Team

An effective threat assessment program starts with a multidisciplinary and well-trained threat assessment team. The role of this team is to make an assessment of the seriousness of a threat and provide resources or offer interventions to assist students pre-crisis. Members of the team may vary depending on the needs of the school or school district, but generally, it should consist of invested stakeholders from across the K-12 school community, including:

- School administrators or leaders
- Mental health professionals
- School counselors
- Coaches
- Medical professionals, such as school nurses
- Law enforcement or school resource officers
- Teachers

The threat assessment team should be trained on how to identify concerning behaviors and have a shared understanding of the threat assessment and reporting processes and protocols at the school. Collaboration among members of the team is key, so schools should consider setting a regular meeting cadence to establish roles and ensure cohesion as a unit.



Establishing a Reporting Program

Reporting programs serve as vital channels for students and school community members to share concerns regarding student safety. When reports are received, these systems can facilitate early intervention and administration of support to help prevent potential incidents of targeted violence. School officials also find that reporting systems can make them more aware and effective in addressing other school safety issues such as bullying, drug use, and incidents of self-harm or suicide risk among students. When concerns are identified early, schools can offer various resources, services, and supports for students in need.

When establishing a reporting system, schools should consider factors such as:

- How will threats be reported? Will the system allow for anonymous and/or confidential reports?
- What technologies or methods will be used to gather reports? Will there be multiple options?
- Will there be a centralized system for collecting reports? Who will field and triage reports, and when?
- What process will be used for prioritizing and responding to reports?

There are numerous factors that affect whether students, teachers, or staff come forward with concerns, including the type of reporting methods available, who is involved in responding to reports, and the overall school environment. Trusting relationships between students and adults in the school community may also help students feel more comfortable in speaking up and sharing concerns.

Offering multiple options for reporting can have a positive impact on the willingness of bystanders to come forward, especially among students who may see or hear things school staff cannot. **Anonymous reporting methods** may help encourage students to make a report, especially if they have fears of retaliation or being labeled as a “snitch.”

Training the Reporting Community

All members of the school community – including school administrators and staff, teachers, facility staff, students, and parents and guardians – play a role in identifying and reporting concerning behaviors. Schools should offer continuous training opportunities for these audiences to learn about indicators of potential self-harm or violence directed at others and how to report these behaviors and/or threats. It is also important to ensure the school community is aware of the process for responding to reports so that they know their reports will be acted upon, kept confidential, and handled appropriately.

Youth, parents, and families may observe concerning behaviors outside of school, so it is vital that they are also engaged and educated about methods to report a threat. Student-led outreach efforts and activities can help spread the word about the need for reporting and how to do it among student populations, since students may hear information differently from a peer rather than an adult.

Evaluating and Responding to a Report

Schools should create a process for evaluating and responding to reports with their threat assessment team. To build credibility and trust with the reporting community, this process should include gathering information from multiple sources to form an accurate picture of the circumstances and student(s) associated with the report, developing a plan to act on potential threats, and being transparent about the actions taken.

One of the benefits of a multidisciplinary threat assessment team is that it allows for multiple viewpoints to assess each report and offer various interventions. Depending on the nature and circumstances of the report, there are many types of interventions that might be necessary to help the student(s) get the support that they need. These actions could include:

- Increasing monitoring or supervision of the student to keep the student and others safe.
- Providing services and/or resources to support the student and reduce risk.
- Warning and/or counseling any intended target, including notification of parents, if applicable.
- Notifying relevant school staff.



Resources

SchoolSafety.gov features a range of resources schools and districts can use to implement and enhance threat assessment and reporting programs. These include:

- **[Averting Targeted School Violence: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Plots Against Schools](#)**
This report examines 67 disrupted plots against K-12 schools from 2006-2018 and highlights the importance of proactive reporting and intervention. The report is accompanied by a [video](#) that further describes the thinking and behavior of the plotters, as well as their attack plans, how the plots were discovered, and how this information can be utilized to prevent violence in schools.
- **[Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence](#)**
This guide provides actionable steps that schools can take to develop comprehensive targeted violence prevention plans and create processes and procedures for conducting threat assessments.
- **[Foundations of Targeted Violence Prevention](#)**
This online training educates the public on threatening or potentially concerning behaviors and where to report them, providing an opportunity for intervention to prevent targeted violence from occurring.
- **[Improving School Safety Through Bystander Reporting: A Toolkit for Strengthening K-12 Reporting Programs](#)**
This toolkit offers simple strategies and guidance K-12 schools and school districts can use to implement and enhance safety reporting programs and encourage bystander reporting among students and other members of the school community.
- **[Master Trainer Program](#)**
This program certifies federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial partners in the instruction of behavioral threat assessment and management best practices and techniques. It is designed to prepare partners to train their local communities and provides organizations with tools to help mitigate threats and prevent acts of terrorism and targeted violence.
- **[Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence](#)**
This report identifies 41 incidents of attacks against K-12 schools in the United States from 2008 to 2017. It includes information on the background and behaviors of the attackers along with a series of ten key findings and significant commonalities.
- **[School Threat Assessment Toolkit](#)**
This toolkit is designed to aid schools in employing behavioral threat assessment and management as part of a comprehensive violence prevention strategy. It includes guidance on the training, implementation, and evaluation of school threat assessment teams.
- **[School Tip Line Toolkit: A Blueprint for Implementation and Sustainability](#)**
This guide is designed to help educators, law enforcement professionals, community leaders, and school safety experts navigate key decisions and consider the factors necessary to support successful and efficient tip line implementation as part of an overall school safety strategy.

Learn more and find additional K-12 threat assessment and reporting resources on [SchoolSafety.gov](#).

Sources: [Averted School Violence Database: 2021 Analysis Update](#) | [Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence](#) | [Improving School Safety Through Bystander Reporting: A Toolkit for Strengthening K-12 Reporting Programs](#) | [Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence](#) | [School Threat Assessment Toolkit](#) | [Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates](#) | [What Is a Threat Assessment Team?](#)

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