

EMBEDDING COUNSELOR WELLNESS IN A THREAT ASSESSMENT MODEL

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Understanding Threat Assessment

- ▣ Share with a partner or small group one or two take-aways from your threat assessment (risk assessment) experiences. Positive? Negative? Somewhere in between?

Targets

- ▣ Participants will increase their understanding of the complexity of threat assessment in schools
- ▣ Participants will increase awareness of evidence-based practices of threat assessment models
- ▣ Participants will learn a structured model for threat assessment
- ▣ Participants will reflect on personal threat assessment experiences

Case Study #1

Jana is a 16 year old high school student. Her English teacher brings a journal written by Jana to the school counselor as the teacher was alarmed by the student's references to dark imagery and the hopeless tone of the writing. The counselor reviews the writing and seeks out Jana for an initial interview.

During the interview the following information is revealed:

- Jana is sad over the recent break-up with boyfriend and feels isolated from peers
- Believes parents have no idea as to how she is feeling
- During the interview the sadness dissipates and Jana becomes cold, offering little response to questions.
- Jana speaks vaguely about intent to harm herself and others because no one cares. She comments about "getting back at the teacher" for showing the counselor the journal entry.

Case Study #1

1. As a counselor with a potential threat, what would you do?
2. Identify the people needing to be involved in the threat assessment process and their roles.
2. What additional information would be helpful in determining the seriousness of the threat
3. What recommendations would be helpful in future work with this student?

Threat to Self and Others

The increase of students threatening others (school violence) and threatening to harm themselves (suicidal ideation) has captured national attention, prompted educators, law enforcement officials, mental health professionals, and parents to press for answers.

1. To what degree did we know threats/attacks were being planned?

2. What could we have done to prevent students from acting on their plans?

3. What protective factors exist in the threat assessment process for counselors?

Threat to Self

WARNING SIGNS:

- Threatening to harm or end one's life
- Seeking or access to means: seeking pills, weapons, or other means
- Evidence or expression of a suicide plan
- Expressing (writing or talking) ideation about suicide, wish to die or death
- Hopelessness
- Rage, anger, seeking revenge
- Acting reckless, engaging impulsively in risky behaviour
- Expressing feelings of being trapped with no way out
- Increasing or excessive substance use
- Withdrawing from family, friends, society
- Anxiety, agitation, abnormal sleep (too much or too little)
- Dramatic changes in mood
- Expresses no reason for living, no sense of purpose in life

POTENTIATING RISK FACTORS:

- | | |
|---|--|
| • Unemployed or recent financial difficulties | • Prior traumatic life events or abuse |
| • Divorced, separated, widowed | • Previous suicide behaviour |
| • Social Isolation | • Chronic mental illness |
| | • Chronic, debilitating physical illness |

Number of Warning Signs

Very High Risk:

seek immediate help from emergency or mental health professional.

High Risk:

seek help from mental health professional

Low Risk:

recommend counseling and monitor for development of warning signs.

Figure 1. Illustration of the Accumulation of Potentiating Risk Factors and Warning Signs on Risk of Suicide (Warning Signs adapted from Rudd et al., 2006).

Threat to self assessments

Table 2. Characteristics of Suicide Risk Assessment Tools

Scale	Administration		# of Items	Predictive Validity	Reliability	Potential Utility		Population Setting			Population Specific ^			
	Self-Report	Interview/Observation				Global Assessment	Screening	Psychiatric			Non-Psychiatric	Adults	Children & Youth	Older Adults
								In	Out	ER				
BSS®	x	x	21	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
BHS		x	20		x		x	x		x			x	
C-SSRS		x				x	x	x	x	x		x	x	
GSIS	x	x	31		x		x	x		x			x	
interRAI-SOS		x	varies*		x	x	x	x	x			x		
MHECC			114				x	x						
NGASR		x	15				x					x		
RFL	x		48		x		x	x		x		x	x	
SAD PERSONAS		x	10				x	x	x	x		x		
SIS-MAP		x	108		x	x		x	x		x	x		
SSI-M		x	18		x	x	x	x				x	x	
SBQ	x		34		x	x	x	x		x		x	x	
SIS		x	15	x	x			x	x		x	x		
SPS	x		36	x	x	x		x	x		x	x		
TASR			26				x	x	x	x	x	x		

Note. **BSS®** – Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation; **BHS** – Beck Hopelessness Scale; **C-SSRS** – Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale; **GSIS** – Geriatric Scale for Suicide Intent; **RAI-MH SOS** – interRAI Mental Health Severity of Self-harm Scale; **MHECC** – Mental Health Environment of Care Checklist; **NGASR** – Nurses Global Assessment of Suicide Risk; **RFL** – Reasons for Living Inventory; **SIS-MAP** – Scale for Impact of Suicidality – Management, Assessment and Planning of Care; **SSI-M** – Modified Scale for Suicide Ideation; **SBQ** – Suicidal Behaviours Questionnaire; **SIS** – Suicide Intent Scale; **SPS** – Suicide Probability Scale; **TASR** – Tool for the Assessment of Suicide Risk.

*The interRAI SOS scale is embedded in a larger mental health assessment system based on three different instruments. The number of items in each instrument varies as does the time to complete the entire assessment.

^ Adults (18-64), Older Adults (65+), Children & Youth (8-18)

Facts or Truths

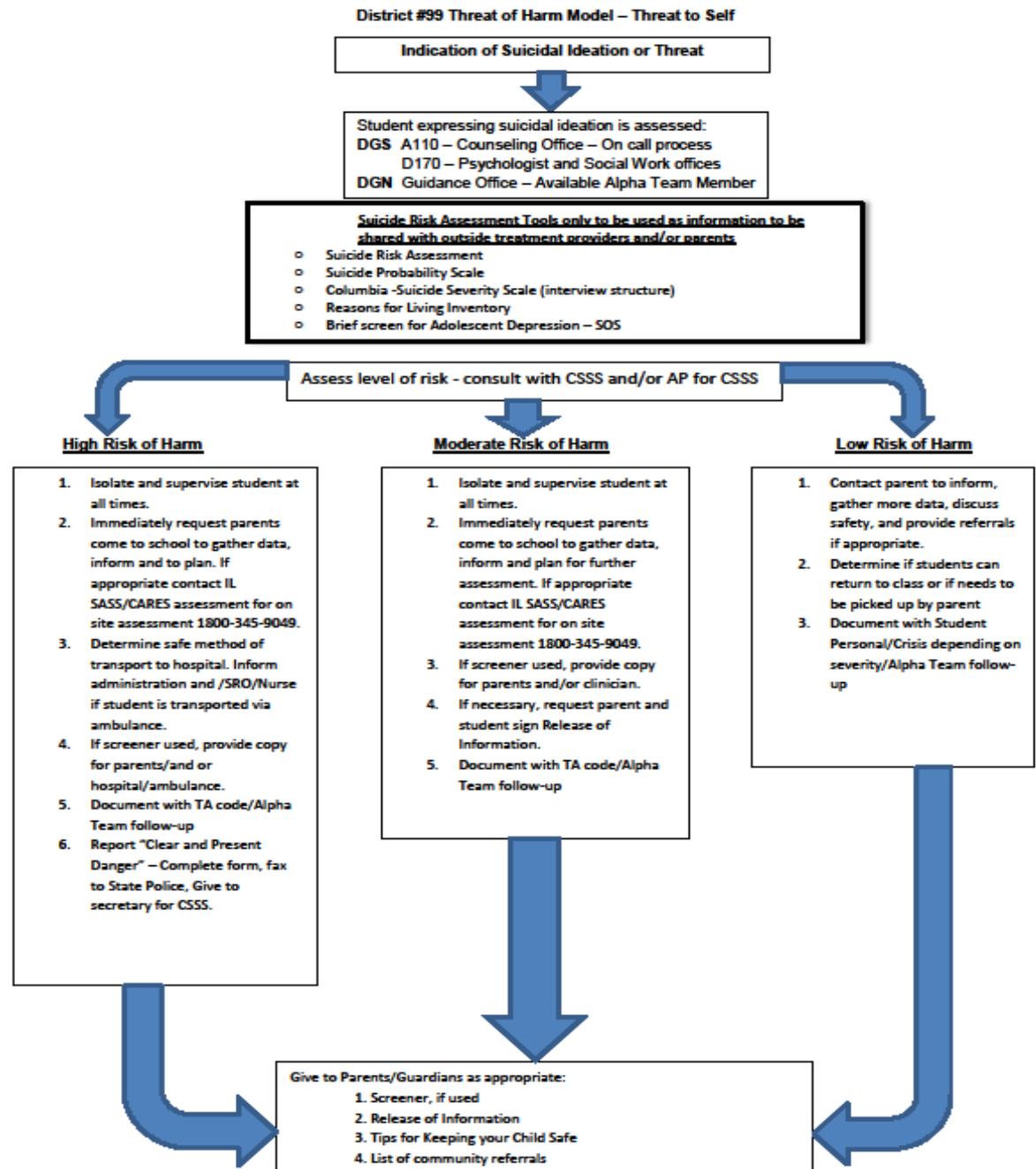
An effective strategy in prevention is related to the fact that most threats are communicated or leaked to others in some manner

Real warning signs are often hidden in the home or computers related to planning and preparing for the incident

- ▣ Telling friends
- ▣ Researching
- ▣ Obtaining weapons
- ▣ Leaking information to persons they do not want to harm
- ▣ Feels the need to make a statement to their peers (those to which they do and do not intend harm)

Focus on behaviors, rather than characteristics

Conducting the Assessment: A model



TA Organize and Analyze

1. What are the student's motive(s) and goals?
2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to harm?
3. Has the student engaged in harm-related behaviors?
4. Does the student have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence on self or others?
5. Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation, and/or despair?
6. Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?
7. Does the student see violence as an acceptable-or desirable-or the only-way to solve problems?
8. Is the student's conversation and "story" consistent with his or her actions?
9. Are other people concerned about the student's potential for violence?
10. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of an attack?

Focus on behaviors, rather than characteristics

Counselor Wellness: ACA's Commitment

- ▣ There are three broad avenues for addressing the needs of impaired counselors:
 - *education of all counselors to prevent impairment,*
 - *securing quality resources, intervention and treatment for impaired counselors,*
 - *and advocacy within ACA and at the state and national levels to address the broader issues surrounding impairment as well as the specific needs of those who are impaired.*

Our work begins with impairment prevention through education on resiliency and wellness-and geared towards all counselors. Education serves to remind counselors of their knowledge about stress and self-care, to help them identify their areas of vulnerability, and to provide strategies for renewal.

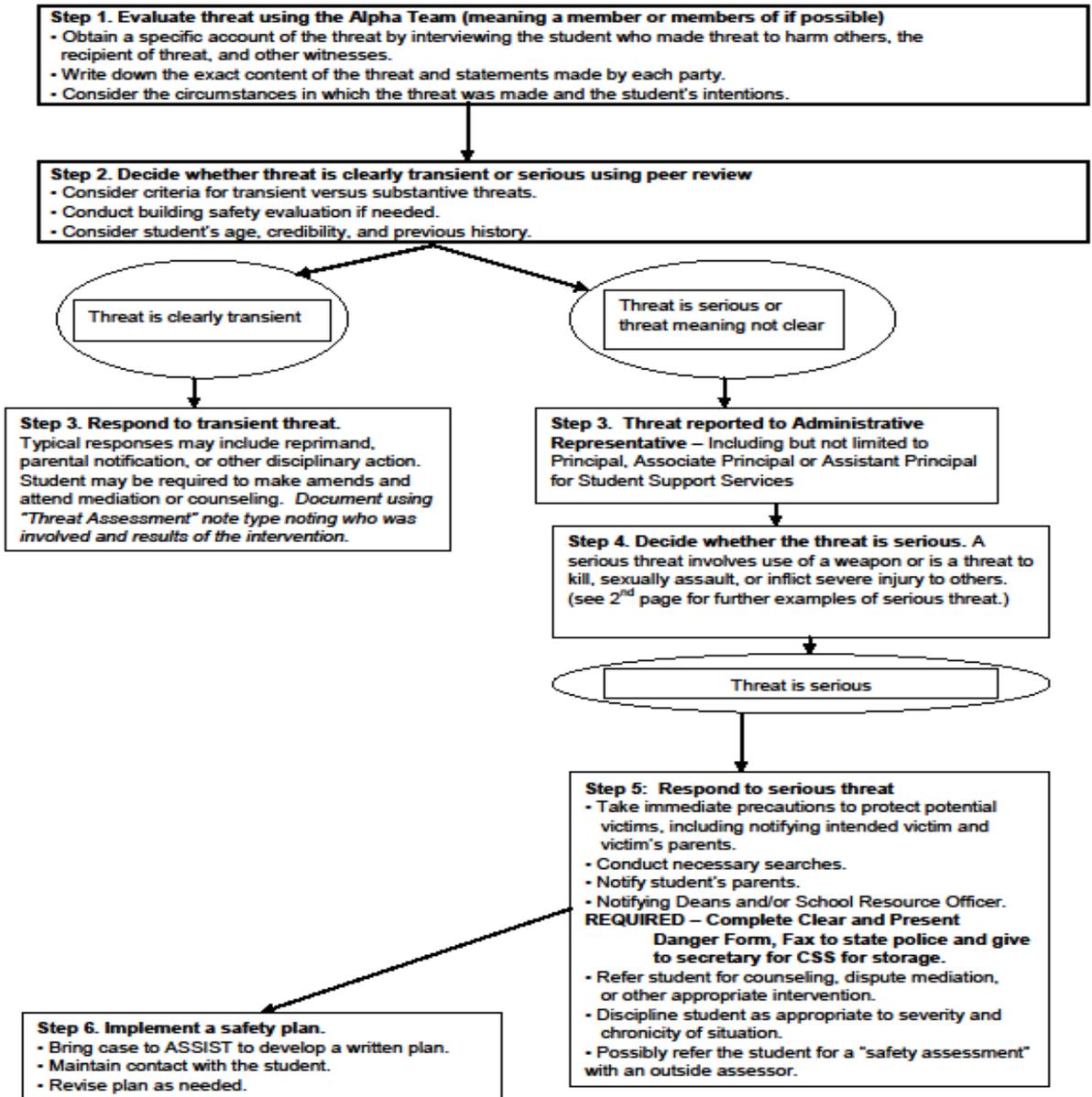
Managing a stressful situation

- ▣ Successful management of a threatening situation requires substantial time and effort.
- ▣ Management of these situations comprises three related functions:

- 1. Controlling/containing the situation and/or student in a way that will prevent the possibility of a threat being carried out.*
- 2. Protecting and aiding possible targets; and*
- 3. Providing support to help the student deal successfully with his or her problems*
- 4. Providing support for counselors and support personnel through systematic consultation and follow-up supervision.*

District #99 – Threat of Harm To Others Assessment Model

Conducting the Assessment: A model



Key Questions in Threat Assessments

- How do I know when and how to involve others in the threat assessment process?
- How do I check on my bias in the process?
- How do I balance advocating for my client/student and the well-being of others?
- What guides my definition of a counselor when working with other professionals in a threat assessment i.e. police, administration, social workers, psychologists, etc. ?
- How can a counselor shape prevention efforts with students/clients with threat of harm risk factors?
- How can schools foster self-care for counselors involved in threat assessments? Threats: students, parents, administration, police, mental health professionals

Case Study #2

- ▣ Deron is a 17 year old student who stated on at least two occasions to a teacher that he knows how to acquire the items to make a bomb. When confronted by the teacher about the inappropriateness of the comments, Deron states he does not plan to make one but just likes to have the knowledge about making bombs.
- ▣ Over the next few weeks, Deron's disruptive behavior escalated by verbal confrontation with staff and other students, slamming desks, punching file cabinets, and slamming doors. Rumors are circulating that his parents are divorcing and a bitter custody dispute is at hand.

Case Study #2

- What would be the recommended steps be for this scenario based on the Threat Assessment model? Is this a transient or serious threat? Identify the people needing to be involved in the threat assessment process and their roles.
- What additional information would be helpful in determining the seriousness of the threat
- What recommendations would be helpful in future work with this student?
- As a result of your dialogue, what questions remain unanswered about the assessment model and its procedures?



Illinois State Police Clear and Present Danger Reporting Instructions for Law Enforcement Officials and School Administrators

The Person Determined to Pose a Clear and Present Danger form shall be used by law enforcement officials and school administrators to report individuals determined to pose a clear and present danger pursuant to 20 II. Admin. Code 1230.120. The form must be submitted within 24 hours of the determination to the Illinois State Police, Firearms Services Bureau in Springfield, Illinois. This reporting duty is separate from any requests for assistance made to a law enforcement agency. For immediate police assistance, School Administrators must still contact their local law enforcement agency or call 911.

Who must Report? Pursuant to 430 ILCS 65/8.1(d)(2) and 430 ILCS 66/105,

- Law enforcement Officials
- School Administrators – principals and chief administrative officers (or their designees) of public and private: elementary and secondary schools, community colleges, colleges, and universities.

What do I Report?

- When a student or other person demonstrates threatening physical or verbal behavior, such as violent, suicidal, or assaultive threats, actions or other behaviors they may be determined to pose a clear and present danger.
- The reporting law enforcement official, school administrator, or their designee must complete **Person Determined to Pose a Clear and Present Danger** form in its entirety and sign it. Specific behaviors and statements leading to the determination must be included in the form's narrative section. Dates and times of occurrence, as well as the names and contact information of any witnesses, should also be included. Additional supporting documentation should be referenced in the narrative section and submitted along with the form.

How do I report?

- The completed form and attachments must be faxed to the Illinois State Police, FOID Enforcement at **217-782-9139** within 24 hours of determining the student poses a clear and present danger.
- The Illinois State Police, Firearms Services Bureau may be contacted at **217-782-3700**, Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., to answer questions or confirm receipt of a submission.
- If you need emergency assistance from the Firearms Services Bureau beyond normal business hours, contact the Illinois State Police, Statewide Terrorism and Intelligence Center at **877-455-7842**.

What else should I know?

- This reporting process is intended to prevent individuals determined to pose a clear and present danger from having access to firearms or firearm ammunition by revoking the individuals FOID Card.
- Clear and present danger reporting shall be made consistent with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (34 CFR § 99.36) to assist the Department with protecting the health and safety of the public by denying persons, who present a clear and present danger, from having lawful access to weapons. School administrators should consider consulting with their legal counsel prior to adopting clear and present danger reporting policies.
- A principal or chief administrative officer, or designee of a principal or chief administrative officer, making the determination and reporting "Clear and Present Danger" shall not be held criminally, civilly, or professionally liable, except for willful or wanton misconduct. (430 ILCS 66/110)

Action Plans for School Leaders

Creating cultures and climates of safety is essential to the prevention of violence in schools.

1. Assess the school's emotional climate.
2. Emphasize the importance of listening in schools.
3. Build collaborative structures between student support personnel.
3. Take a strong, but caring stance against the code of silence.
4. Work actively to change the perception that talking to an adult about a student contemplating violence is considered snitching
5. Address all bullying concerns.
6. Empower students by involving them in planning, creating, and sustaining a school culture of safety and respect.
7. Ensure that every student feels that he or she has a trusting relationship with at least one adult at school.
8. Create mechanisms for developing and sustaining safe school climates.
9. Be aware of physical environments and their effects on creating comfort zones
10. Emphasize an integrated systems model
11. All climates of safety ultimately are "local."

Conclusions

- An effective model for threat assessment requires a team approach. A school employee should never operate in isolation when assessing a threat to self or to others. Throughout the model are intended dialogue points to achieve this purpose.
- Student safety is an essential component to sustaining a successful academic environment for all students.
- Students, parents, faculty, community members, and community agencies and organizations, are strongly encouraged to engage in a partnership with school personnel to provide a safe environment for all.

Conclusions

- Periodic training in threat assessment and interviewing is integral to maintaining a staff that is in a consistent state of readiness to intervene.
- Prevention structures are an important component in assisting the development of socially competent students. When the level of need rises to crisis intervention, the same degree of systematic process is required.
- In order to provide a comprehensive assessment model, it is important to foster and maintain regular communication with identified community resources. It would be the intention to have at least yearly contact with identified professionals to review the model and protocols.

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