Ask the Experts Webinar Series:

Behavior Threat Assessment in the Virtual Environment
“Ask the Experts” Webinar Series

• Series of recorded webinars to be posted on the NASP website
• Webinars are designed to offer support to school psychologists, interns, and practicum students as they navigate the delivery of school psychological services during the COVID-19 pandemic
• Each webinar will be followed by the opening of a discussion thread on the NASP member exchange community
• Each webinar will:
  — Address critical questions emerging as a result of the need to provide virtual telehealth school psychological services
  — Provide advice and guidance from experts
  — Offer suggested strategies and resources for addressing professional practice issues
Expert Presenters

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Special Thanks to Dr. Scott Woitaszewski, Ph.D., Professor and Director of School Psychology Program at the University of WI (River Falls), for his contributions to this presentation.
Anticipated Outcomes

• To understand the similarities and differences in conducting a behavior threat assessment during extended school closures.

• To understand the process for managing behavior threat assessment cases in a virtual environment.
Key NASP Resources

Key Philosophy...

“There is no profile of a student attacker.”
What types of issues impact school safety?
“Any student can make a threat, but relatively few will engage in the planning and preparation necessary to carry out the threat.”

Step 1: Establish a Team

- Multi-disciplinary
  - Administration
  - Mental health professional (school counselor, psychologist, social worker)
  - SRO/local law enforcement
  - School security
  - Special Education
  - Etc.

Step 1: Establishing a Team in a Virtual Environment, continued

- Teams can meet virtually!

- Considerations:
  - Secure cloud-based platform
  - Assign responsibilities
  - Use a spreadsheet or a project management platform to keep track of assignments, deadlines, and assignment completion.
  - Expect interruptions
  - Be flexible
  - Adopt and emphasize a care-for-the-caregiver culture
Step 1: Establishing a Team in a Virtual Environment, continued

• Is team composition different in a virtual environment?
  o No. School teams remain the same.
  o Community providers may be more critical (i.e., law enforcement, community mental health, community supports, etc.)
  o Monitoring and intervention with the person of concern and potential target(s)
  o Review and/or revise MOU’s to include community resources
  o Identify trusted adult for person of concern
Step 2: Define Prohibited and Concerning Behaviors

Threat behaviors occur on a continuum:

“I want to kill you!!!”

Bringing a weapon to school with intent to use it.

- Determine Threshold for Intervention
- Making a threat vs *posing* a threat
Step 2: Prohibited or Concerning Behaviors, continued

• Possible increase in:
  o Concerning social media posts
  o Engagement with virtual communities that encourage violence
  o Threats made during video conferencing classroom sessions
  o Cyberbullying
  o Increased resentment due to societal and educational inequities
  o Mental health concerns due to social isolation
  o Symptomatology of previous MH concerns
  o Anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse
  o Increased exposure to domestic violence
  o Student, family, community stressors
Step 2: Prohibited or Concerning Behaviors, *continued*

- Contributing factors that may increase risk during physical distancing:
  - Decreased adult supervision (e.g., of internet activities)
  - Decreased access to protective factors (e.g., mentors, positive peers, activities)

- Assess for:
  - Time to plan (e.g., less structured day)
  - Opportunities (e.g., less supervision)
  - Ability (e.g., cognitive and physical ability to carry out)
  - Desire (e.g., more stress/angst)
  - Stimuli (e.g., stressors impacting life)
Step 3: Centralized Reporting

• Various reporting methods should be available:
  o Online form
  o Dedicated email address or phone number
  o Phone App
  o Anonymous reporting
  o 911
  o Tell an adult

• Training & Awareness
  o Teach students and staff how to recognize and report
  o Be aware of cultural considerations and past community traumas that impact the willingness to report
Step 4: Law Enforcement Intervention?

• Immediately report if:
  o Weapons
  o Threats of violence
  o Physical violence
  o Additional concerns about an individual’s safety

• If SRO unavailable, determine law enforcement contact and process for engaging in BTAM
Step 4: Law Enforcement Intervention During COVID-19

- LE and/or mental health intervention may be earlier in the process than normal
- Identify access to current law enforcement supports
  - Many SRO’s have now been reassigned

If law enforcement’s initial determination is person of concern is not an imminent threat, that does not absolve school team from completing BTAM process.
Step 5: Establish Assessment Procedures

• Still responsible for gathering data

• Use multi-method, multi-source approach
  o Examine online sources (e.g., social media)
  o Conduct interviews with person of concern and others with information
    ✓ Use secure virtual platforms or phone (disguise personal #)
    ✓ Two interviewers preferred
  o Records review (e.g., academic, disciplinary, law enforcement, etc.)
  o Review class assignments
Step 5: Establish Assessment Procedures, continued

- Build rapport that facilitates information-gathering
- Evaluate the student’s concerns based on age, socio-emotional, and developmental level
- Contextual assessment
Step 5: Establish Assessment Procedures, continued

Investigate themes or areas that impact the student’s behavior, actions, circumstances, etc.

- Motives and goals
- Concerning, unusual, threatening communications
- Inappropriate interest in weapons, school shooters, mass attacks, or other types of violence
- Access to weapons
- Stressful events (i.e., setbacks, challenges, or losses)
- Capacity to carry out an attack
- Evidence of “pathway behaviors” - ideation, planning, preparation/acquisition, implementation
- Protective factors
Parents refuse to cooperate?

• Emphasize collaborative process
• Validate current stressors and goal is to help
• Document the actions taken to try and secure permission
• If still uncooperative, and as appropriate, refer case to appropriate authorities (e.g., law enforcement, community mental health, child protective services, etc.)
Step 5: Establish Assessment Procedures, continued

• Additional considerations in the virtual environment:
  o Video Conferencing platforms
    ✓ Must be a secured environment
    ✓ Video is preferred over phone interviews
    ✓ Ask who is also present in the room
  o Privacy and Confidentiality
  o Virtual retrieval of student and staff member records
Step 6: Develop Risk Management Options

• Develop individualized management and intervention plan
  o Progress Monitoring
    ✓ Virtual check-ins
  o Resources/interventions to assist the student and family is critical
    ✓ Virtual supports
    ✓ Community supports
    ✓ Social supports
  o Determine if disciplinary action is appropriate
    ✓ Overly punitive measures can escalate risk
Step 6: Develop Risk Management Options, *continued*

- Managing victim fear when schools are closed:
  - Ensure potential target(s) limits their social media presence - less ability for person making the threat to interact
    - Activate privacy settings
    - Turn off location trackers
  - Encourage friends, family, teachers, etc. to not tag potential victims in social media posts
  - If possible, do not engage with person of concern making the threats
  - Assist teachers in monitoring of chats in virtual classrooms
    - This includes comments made on group assignments completed on cloud-based technology (i.e.,Google Docs).
Step 6: Develop Risk Management Options, *continued*

- **Managing person of concern:**
  - Ask family to block access to weapons, increase monitoring, model prosocial behaviors.

- **Reduce stressors by providing resources and supports**
  - Assist family with:
    - basic needs (e.g., food banks)
    - social supports (e.g., mental health agencies)
    - behavior management strategies
    - safety measures

- **Contact law enforcement if student is thinking/planning violence**
Step 7: Create Safe School Climates

- Reinforce a safe school (home) environment while providing a virtual education
  - Students
  - Staff
- Encourage all staff members to continue building positive, trusting relationships with students
  - Each student should identify at least one trusted adult
- Address cyberbullying in the virtual environment
- Care-for-the-caregiver support
Step 8: Training for All

• School safety is everyone’s responsibility!
• Provide training for:
  o Reporting in the virtual environment
  o All school staff (not just certified ones)
  o Students
  o Parents/Guardians
  o Law enforcement
  o New BTAM members
Questions and Considerations
NASP COVID-19 Resources

• NASP COVID-19 Resource Center

• Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management in a Virtual Environment

• Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM): Best Practice Considerations for K-12 Schools
External Resources

- Protecting America’s Schools: A US Secret Services Analysis of Targeted School Violence

- Final Report and Findings of the Safe Schools Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the US
  https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf

- Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model
References


References


• US Department of Education
Helping Children Thrive • In School • At Home • In Life