Developing and Implementing Campus-Based Threat Assessment Teams

Major Gene Deisinger, Ph.D.
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Deputy Chief of Police & Director, Threat Management Services
Sterrett Facilities Complex (0523), Blacksburg, VA 24060
Phone: (540) 231-5123 Email: erdeisin@vt.edu

MAJOR GENE DEISINGER, Ph.D., serves as Deputy Chief of Police and Director of Threat Management Services for Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Major Deisinger serves as executive officer for the Virginia Tech Police Department (VTPD), a nationally accredited law enforcement agency. In addition to his command responsibilities with VTPD, Dr. Deisinger also manages the university's threat assessment and management functions.

Dr. Deisinger earned his doctorate in counseling psychology from Iowa State University. He is a licensed psychologist, a certified health service provider in psychology, and a certified peace officer.

Dr. Deisinger was a founding member of the Iowa State University Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT). This multi-disciplinary team served as a pro-active planning group and coordinates institutional responses during crisis situations. Dr. Deisinger served as the primary threat manager for Iowa State University from the team's inception in 1994, until accepting his current position at Virginia Tech. Dr. Deisinger has personally managed and supervised threat cases and protective details for a broad range of governmental dignitaries, public figures, and members of the university community.

Dr. Deisinger has provided consultation and training to numerous colleges and universities across the United States and been an invited presenter for several national organizations. Dr. Deisinger is co-author of the recently released, *Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment & Management Teams*, a practical resource designed specifically for institutions of higher education. He serves as a subject matter expert and trainer for the Campus Threat Assessment Training initiative for institutions of higher education. This program is offered through Margolis, Healy & Associates under a grant from the US Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Dr. Deisinger is committed to the safety and well-being of the campus and local community and has served as the team leader for a multi-jurisdictional team of law enforcement officers who provide early intervention and crisis response to persons with mental illness. He has provided basic and advanced training for hundreds of law enforcement officers regarding recognition of and response to mentally ill persons. This training has helped improve the safety and effectiveness of law enforcement personnel in responding to these calls for service and enhanced the safety and well-being of persons in crisis. He has also served as the commander of a multi-agency Hostage/Crisis Negotiation team and has assisted in safely resolving numerous crisis situations. Dr. Deisinger has taught numerous courses on hostage/crisis negotiation and served on instructor teams for courses offered through the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Developing and Implementing Campus Threat Assessment Teams

Gene Deisinger, Ph.D.

Deputy Chief of Police &
Director, Threat Management Services
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Presented for the:
FY 2008 EMHE Final Grantee Meeting
San Antonio, TX
December 10, 2009

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Gene Deisinger, Ph.D.

- Ph.D., Counseling Psychology;
  - Licensed Psychologist;
  - Certified Health Service Provider in Psychology;
- Certified Peace Officer;
- Founding member, Iowa State University
  - Critical Incident Response Team &
  - Threat Management Team
  - Primary Threat Manager since 1994
- Former Clinical Director,
  ISU Student Counseling Service

Session Topics

- Overview of Campus Violence & Mental Health;
- Overview of Threat Assessment;
- Guiding Principles of Threat Assessment;
- Components of Threat Assessment Processes;
- Steps in the Threat Assessment Process;
- Effective Case Management Strategies;
- Legal Issues;
- Common Problems and Solutions;

Campus Violence Overview

- Virginia Tech most lethal shooting, but not the first attack on a college campus.
- Myths & misconceptions still govern some decision-making.
- Homicidal violence on campus is not new, nor exclusive to students.
- Suicides remain an important concern.

Campus Violence Overview

- Campus personnel face range of concerning and criminal behavior.
- Campus threat assessment can address not only homicidal violence, but broad range of concerning behavior.
- Goal is to identify concerns early, investigate, and connect person with necessary resources to address problems.

On-Campus Violence

Type of Violence	2004	2005	2006	2007
Murder	16	11	8	46
Forcible Sex	2689	2722	2717	2704
Robbery	2077	2055	1981	1962
Aggravated Assault	2995	2906	3022	2834
Arson	1072	1024	975	790
Injurious Hate Crimes	30	32	51	31
Illegal Weapon Arrests	1377	1450	1412	1446

Source: US Dept. of Education Office of Post-Secondary Education

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Mental Health on Campus

Centers Dealing With:	Percent
Obsessive Pursuit Cases *	38
Hospitalization of Student	87
Student Suicide	26
Client Suicide	22
Clients Referred for Psychiatric Evaluation	15
Clients Prescribed Psychiatric Medications	23

* 271 cases of obsessive pursuit were reported, with 80 students injured and 9 killed by their pursuer.

Source: 2007 National Survey of University Counseling Center Directors

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Mental Health on Campus

Reported Increases In Students:	Percent
With severe psychological problems	91
Coming to college on medication	88
Seeking counseling	11
Being victims of relationship violence	41
Being victims of sexual assault	22
Engaging in self-injurious behaviors	15
Having problems with alcohol abuse	23
Whose parents call regarding services	23

Source: 2007 National Survey of University Counseling Center Directors

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Mental Health on Campus

Counseling Center Clients Reporting:	Percent*
Prior counseling experience	51
Prior use of psychiatric medications	34
Prior psychiatric hospitalization	9
Prior drug or alcohol treatment	5

**Note: Includes prior to and after starting college.*

Source: Center for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health (CSCMH): 2009 Pilot Study

Mental Health on Campus

Counseling Center Clients Reporting:	Percent*
Non-suicidal self-injury	21
Seriously considered suicide	25
Prior suicide attempt	8
Seriously considered harming others	8
Afraid of losing control & acting violently	7
Intentionally harmed another person	5

**Note: Includes prior to and after starting college.*

Source: Center for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health (CSCMH): 2009 Pilot Study

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Mental Health on Campus

Counseling Center Clients:	Percent
Clients with Severe mental health issues	49
➢ Impaired ability to maintain enrollment	8
➢ Severely distressed but treatable	41

Source: 2007 National Survey of University Counseling Center Directors

Mental Health on Campus

College Students Reporting:	Percent*
Felt very sad	79
Felt so depressed, difficult to function	43
Diagnosed with depression	5
Seriously considered suicide	9
Attempted suicide**	1

**Note: Includes 1 or more times in the last school year.*

*** Approximately 1100 college students commit suicide each year.*

Source: American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment (Spring 2008; N=80,121)

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

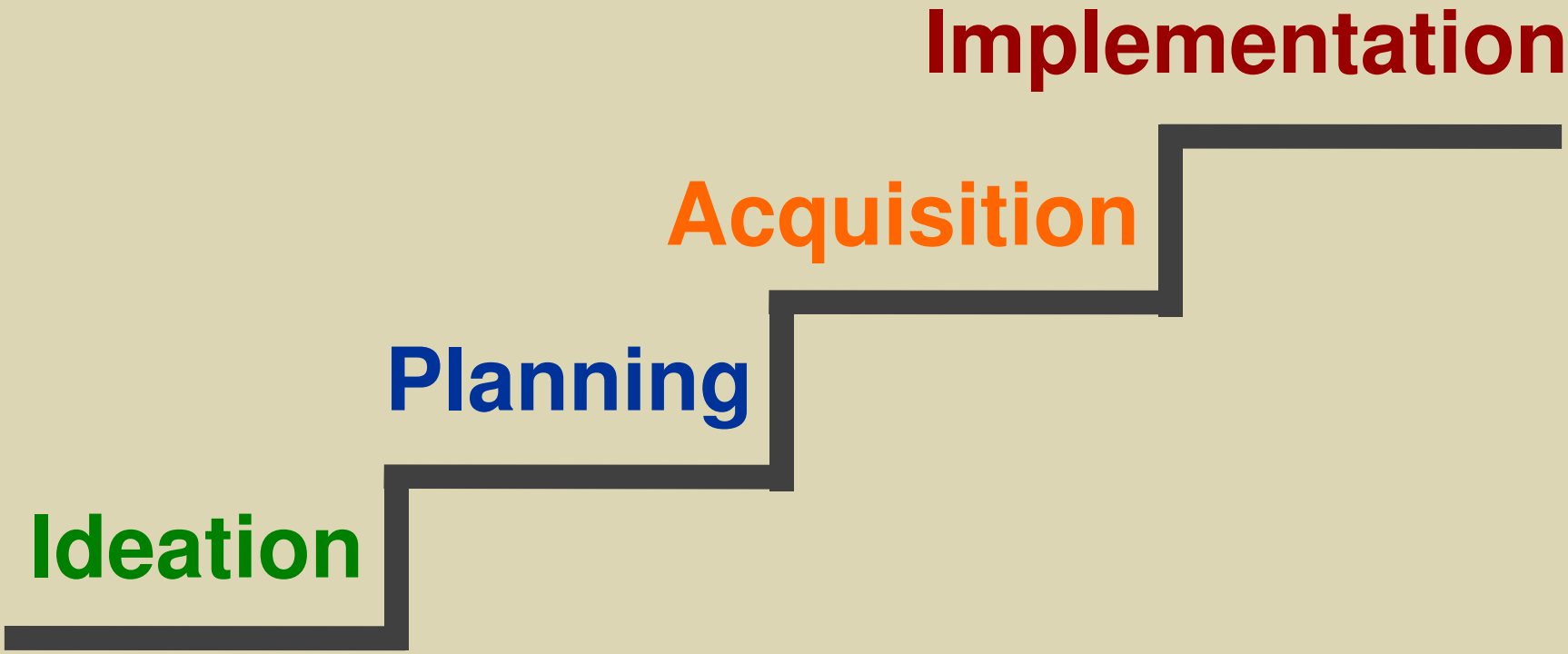
Facts About Campus Attacks

Perpetrators of serious campus violence don't "just snap."

These incidents are <u>not</u> impulsive or random.

- Most (over 75%) consider, plan, and prepare before engaging in violent behavior;
- Most (over 75%) discuss their plans with others before the attack.

Pathway to Violence



Facts About Campus Attacks

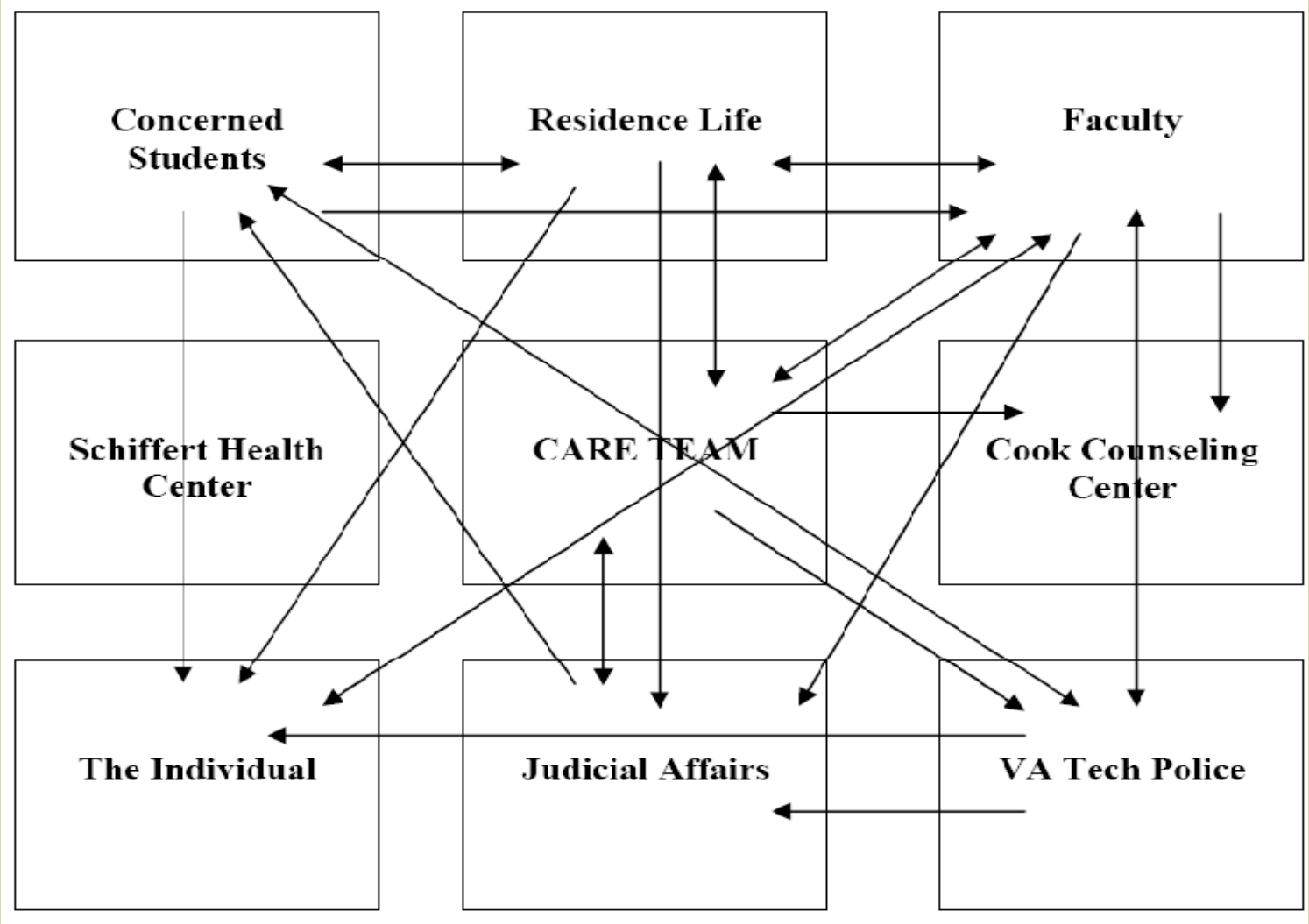
We cannot know whether to be concerned by a subject's appearance – but we can tell by their behavior.

- There is no useful profile of a campus or workplace shooter; but….
- Most (@90%) concern several others with troubling behavior before their attacks. They are already on multiple "radar screens."
- Most are suicidal or at a point of desperation prior to their attacks.

Implications

- Many campus and workplace targeted attacks can be prevented.
- Information about a person's ideas and plans for violence can be observed or discovered before harm can occur.
- But information available is likely to be scattered and fragmented.
- Key is to act quickly upon an initial report of concern, see who else has a piece of the puzzle, then pull all the information together to see what picture emerges.

Information Pathways



SOURCE: OIG Report #140-07: Investigation of the April 16, 2007 Critical Incident at Virginia Tech. Prepared by: Office of the Inspector General for Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services – Commonwealth of Virginia

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Implications

- Assessment involves asking: Is this person on a pathway toward violence?
- Using a team can be particularly effective for gathering and evaluating information, and intervening if necessary.
- Threat assessment and case management is not an adversarial process. Engagement with a person of concern can be critical to preventing violence or harm.

Current Prevention Approaches

- Mental health violence risk assessment/ (Clinical assessment of dangerousness);
- Automated decision-making;
- Profiling;
- Threat assessment;

Mental Health Risk Assessment

- Also known as a clinical assessment of dangerousness
- Evaluates a person's risk for more general/prevalent types of affective violence
- Not intended (nor effective) for evaluating risk of a targeted attack
- May supplement threat assessment process but is not a replacement

Automated Decision-Making

Two Areas of Concern:

- The statistical or mathematical process for making the evaluation is unknown
- No correlation between satisfaction with using the automated tool and the accuracy of the decision made

Profiling

- Most commonly used as an investigative tool to describe the person or type of person who committed a particular crime
- It is retrospective in that it uses clues from a crime that has already occurred to narrow down possible suspects
- When used with respect to evaluating risk of violence, profiling is prospective, not retrospective

Prospective Profiling

Gather data on offense characteristics

↓

Identify common characteristics to generate composite

↓

Compares the person in question with the composite

↓

Closer the match, the greater the cause for concern

Profiling – Two Major Failings

- It identifies far more people that match a profile but do not pose a threat
- It fails to identify a person whose behavior suggests real concern but whose traits or characteristics do not match the profile

Individual Profile

- Male (80+%);
- White (75%) / Majority race (85%+);
- Age:

Social violence:	15-24
School violence:	15-17
Workplace violence:	30-45
Stalking violence:	35-40

- Military / Weapons experience;
- Power & control oriented;
- Obsessed / Identifies with violence.

Overview of Threat Assessment

A systematic process that is designed to:

1) • Identify persons of concern

2) • Gather information/investigate

3) • Assess information and situation

4) • Manage the situation

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

The Threat Assessment Process

Threat assessment is an objective process:

Facts → **Conclusions** → **Strategies**

Why Threat Assessment?

- Evidence-based.
- Derived from U.S. Secret Service model, also supported by FBI recommendations.
- Used successfully to prevent campus, school, and workplace shootings.
- Broadly applicable for identifying people in need.
- Low-cost and effective.

Why Threat Assessment?

- Recommended by:
  - Virginia Tech Review Panel (governor's panel)
  - Virginia and Illinois law
  - US Departments of Education, Justice, and Health & Human Services;
  - NAAG, IACLEA, NASPA, MHEC, others
- Recommended by state task forces in FL, IL, IA, MO, NC, OK, VA, and WI.
- Legally defensible approach.

Threat Assessment Principles

1. Prevention is possible

- Acts of targeted violence typically follow a logical progression of behavior:
  - Idea
  - Plan
  - Acquisition
  - Implementation
- This allows opportunities for behavioral progression to be observed.

Threat Assessment Principles

2. Violence is a dynamic process

- Not asking whether this is a “violent person.”
- Looking at changes in circumstances, situation, and its impact on the person in question.

Threat Assessment Principles

3. Targeted Violence is the product of an interaction among four factors:

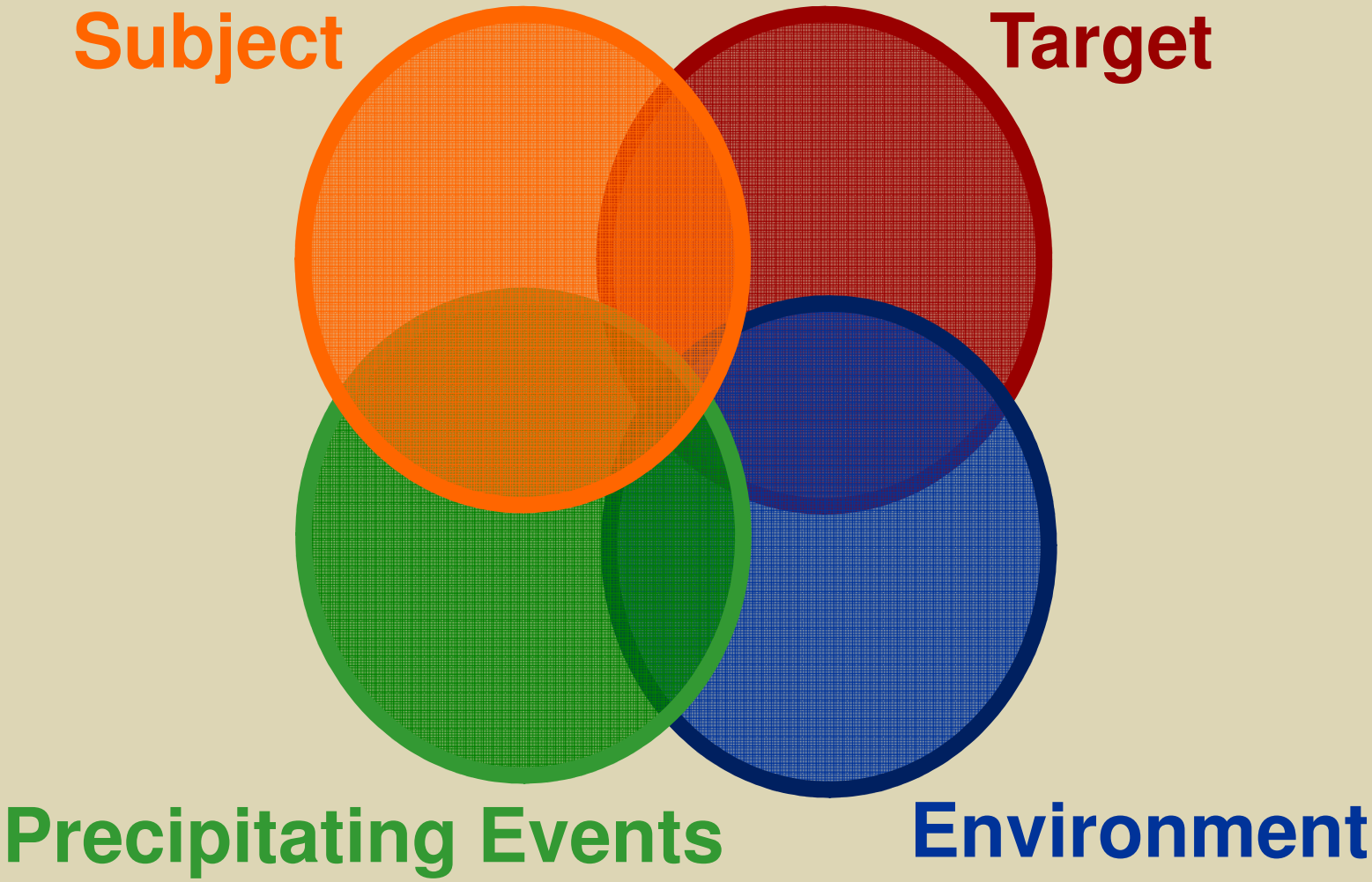
S The **subject** who may take violent action;

T Vulnerabilities of the **target** of such actions;

E An **environment** that facilitates or permits violence, or does not discourage it; and,

P **Precipitating events** that may trigger reactions.

Components of Risk



Threat Assessment Principles

4. Corroboration is critical

- Check facts
- Use multiple sources
- Gauge credibility of sources
- Maintain a healthy skepticism

Threat Assessment Principles

5. Threat assessment is about behavior, not profiles

- There is no accurate or useful profile of a "workplace shooter."
- Focus is on behavior that suggests a potential for harm OR some need for assistance.

Threat Assessment Principles

6. Cooperating systems are critical resources

- Multiple, communicating systems facilitate all aspects of threat assessment
  - Identification
  - Information-gathering
  - Assessment
  - Management or referral
- Team can facilitate liaison with local agencies.

Threat Assessment Principles

7. Determine if situation poses a threat

- Critical question is about behavior along a pathway toward harm.
- Focus is not solely on whether the person made a threat.
- Expressed threats (or the lack thereof) are not reliable indicators.

Threat Assessment Principles

8. Keep victims in mind

- Threat assessment involves victim concerns as well.
- Victims are typically more concerned about case management than threat assessment.
- Team members should focus on victim safety and well-being, as well as assessment and management.

Threat Assessment Principles

9. Early identification and intervention helps everyone

- Early identification allows greater range of options for case management.
- Law enforcement involvement may not be necessary.
- Alliance is more likely.
- False positives are cleared more rapidly.

Threat Assessment Principles

10. Multiple reporting mechanisms enhance early identification

- Simple, easy, direct access to the threat assessment team is critical for effective reporting.
- Multiple ways to report can enhance likelihood of reporting.
- Can counter-balance normal reluctance to report.

Threat Assessment Principles

11. Multi-faceted resources can provide effective intervention

- Maximize effectiveness through multiple, sustained, and coordinated efforts.
- Address the major contributing factors to change the equation.

Threat Assessment Principles

12. Safety is a primary focus

- Safety is guiding mission of all threat assessment and management efforts.
- Assessment and management steps are all tools toward the goal of safety.

Context of Safe Campuses

Planning and preparation are critical

Safety conscious campuses have a pro-active plan in place to:

- Prevent violence;
- Identify persons at risk;
- Intervene with developing concerns;
- Respond to violent acts; and
- Recover from the event.

Specific Components of a Campus Threat Assessment Program

- Threat Assessment Team;
- Administration support;
- Policies and procedures necessary for functioning;
- Legal counsel input on information-sharing;
- Incident tracking and other record-keeping;
- Multiple reporting mechanisms;
- Effective case management resources and strategies.

Enhance Capacity

Use organizational resources and processes more effectively to enhance:

- **Communication**
- **Collaboration**
- **Coordination**
- **Capitalization**

Threat Assessment Team: Functional Authority and Role

- Understand threats / concerns;
- Evaluate legitimacy of concerns;
- Identify motivations for violence;
- Assess likelihood of physical harm;
- Develop strategies for risk reduction;
- Guide implementation of strategies;
- Re-evaluate threat;
- Evaluate needs of community.

Threat Assessment Team: Scalable Capacity

- Utilize existing resources / mechanisms;
- Identify gaps in services;
- Evaluate & maximize communications;
- Involve relevant components;

Need for Collaboration

"Most important, dangerous people rarely show all of their symptoms to just one department or group on campus. A professor may see a problem in an essay, the campus police may endure belligerent statements, a resident assistant may notice the student is a loner, the counseling center may notice that the student fails to appear for a follow-up visit. Acting independently, no department is likely to solve the problem. In short, colleges must recognize that managing an educational environment is a team effort, calling for collaboration and multilateral solutions."

Source: Peter Lake, Chronicle of Higher Ed 6/29/2007

Threat Assessment Team Membership:

- Academic Affairs / Provost / Graduate College;
- Employee Assistance;
- Human Resource Services;
- Media Relations;
- Police / Security;
- Residence Life;
- Student Affairs / Dean of Students;
- Student Health / Counseling Service;
- University Counsel;

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Conceptualizing the Team

- Players (First-string);
- Players (Second-string, speciality units);
- Team Leadership;
  - Owners;
  - Coaches;
- Trainers;
- Marketing;
- Scouts;
- Fans.

Skills of Effective Team Leaders

- Passionate about the goals of the team;
- Familiar with threat assessment principles and practices;
- Demonstrates an inquisitive and skeptical mindset;
- Exercises good sense of judgment, objectivity, and thoroughness;
- Relates well with others;
- Effectively facilitates team discussion;
- Advocates for necessary resources.

Case Management

Use “crew resource management”*:

- Consensus-driven decision making;
- Team leader may make ultimate decision, but everyone is obligated to share opinions and raise concerns and ideas;
- Focus on what still works – for the person and their situation;
- Focus on what the team, or institution, can change or fix;

Source: NASA and major airlines

Case Management

"Crew resource management" (Continued):

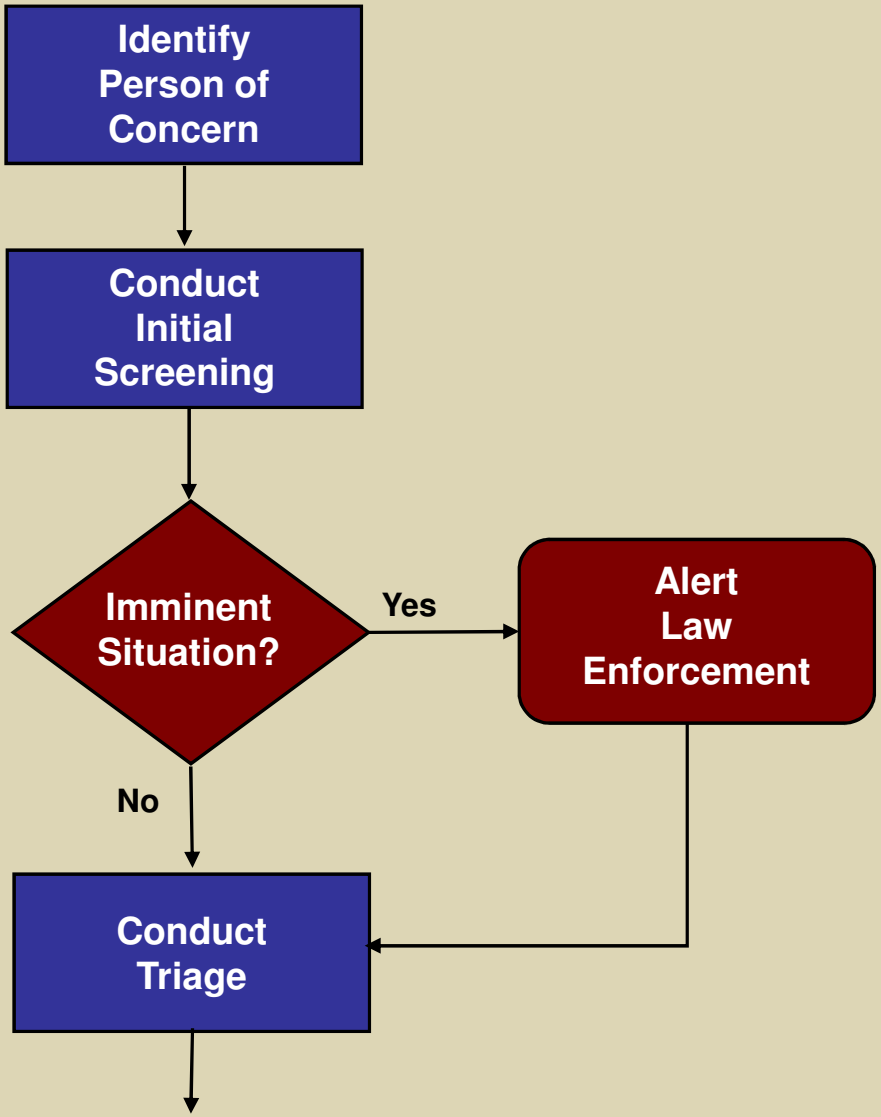
- Think creatively about resources, as well as "eyes and ears."
- Anticipate likely change in the short and mid-term, and how the subject may react.
- Monitor using available resources. Who sees the person regularly, inside work/campus, outside, on weekends, online, etc.?
- Document decision-making, implementation, and progress.

Source: NASA and major airlines

The Threat Assessment Process

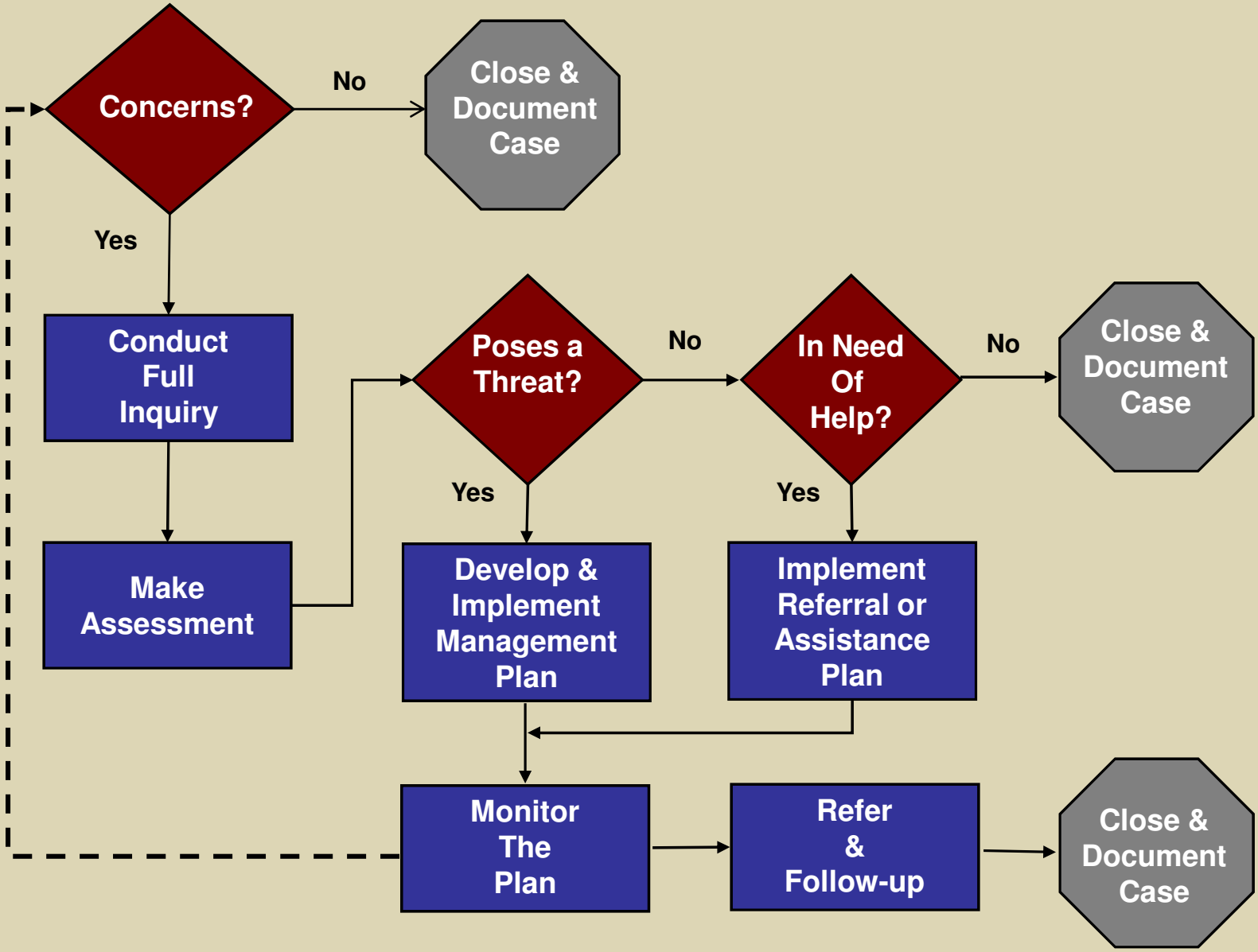
- Facilitate reporting to team
- Identify / learn of person at risk
- Gather information
- Evaluate person/situation
- If necessary, develop threat management plan
- Implement threat management plan
- Monitor and re-evaluate plan to ensure safety
- Refer and follow-up as appropriate

Threat Assessment Process:



VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Threat Assessment Process:



Facilitate Reporting

For reporting to be effective, people need to know:

- Their role and responsibility to report
- What to report
- Where to report
- Reports are wanted
- Something will be done
- Regular reminders of issues and process

"If you see something, say something."

Source: NYC Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Setting a Threshold for Team Involvement

Participant Exercise:

- What information do you want reported to your threat assessment team?
- What ‘threshold” do you want to establish for reporting?
- How will you communicate this with your campus?

Early Identification

- Persons at risk of:
  - Harm to others
  - Harm to self
- Persons who demonstrate inability to take care of themselves:
  - Serious mental health concerns
  - Substance abuse
- Behavior that is significantly disruptive to the learning, living, or working environment

Key Points about Violence

Dangerousness is not a permanent state of being nor solely an attribute of a person.

Dangerousness is situational & based on:

- **J**ustification;
- **A**lternatives;
- **C**onsequences; and
- **A**bility.

Source: Gavin de Becker
The Gift of Fear

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Facilitate Reporting

- Available 24 / 7
- Records protected in centralized database
- Cross-referenced with other police contacts
- Trained personnel

Initial Screening

Gather initial information from key sources:

- TAM Team database;
- Student Affairs;
- Academic Affairs;
- Human Resources;
- Campus police/security;
- Local law enforcement;
- Online searches;
- Other_____

Initial Screening

Helpful Internet sites include:

Google.com

MySpace.com

Facebook.com

YouTube.com

Technorati.com
(searches blogs)

Twitter.com

Blackplanet.com

MiGente.com

Bebo.com

Xanga.com

Snopes.com

thehoodup.com

craigslist.com
(search the relevant city/town)

JuicyCampus.com

RateMyProfessor.com

Cuil.com

VirginiaTech
Invent the Future

Imminent Situation?

- Determine if situation is emergency/imminent, E.g., Subject has:
  - Displayed a weapon;
  - Indicated intent to use it;
  - Has access to target;
  - Attempted to gain access.
- Threat Assessment vs. Crisis Management;
- If imminent/emergency, call law enforcement;
- If not, move on to Triage;

Triage

- Triage questions can include:
  - Has there been indications of suicidal thoughts, plans, or attempts?
  - Has there been indications of thoughts/plans of violence?
  - Does the person have access to a weapon or are they trying to gain access?
  - Are there concerns about the well-being of the subject?
  - Are there concerns about the safety of the community?
- If yes, a full inquiry is recommended.

Gather Information (Full Inquiry)

- Think broadly and creatively about those who might have information:
  - Co-workers
  - Other staff
  - Friends
  - Family
  - Online friends, web sites, etc.
  - Previous schools / employers
  - Others?
- Document information and use it to answer the Key Investigative Questions.

Key Investigative Questions

1. **What are the person's motive(s) and goals? What brought the subject to our attention?**
   - Does the situation or circumstance that led to these statements or actions still exist?
   - Does the person have a major grievance or grudge? Against whom?
   - What efforts have been made to resolve the problem and what has been the result?
   - Does the person feel that any part of the problem is resolved or see any alternatives?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002) *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*.

Key Investigative Questions

2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?

- What, if anything, has the person communicated to someone else (targets, friends, co-workers, others) or written in a diary, journal, email, or Web site concerning his or her grievances, ideas and/or intentions?
- Has anyone been alerted or "warned away"?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002)
Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates.

Key Investigative Questions

3. Has the person shown any inappropriate interest in campus attacks/attackers, weapons, incidents of mass violence?

- Workplace/school attacks or attackers;
- Weapons (including recent acquisition of any relevant weapon);
- Incidents of mass violence (terrorism, rampage violence, mass murderers).

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).

Key Investigative Questions

4. Has the person engaged in attack-related behaviors?

- Developing an attack idea or plan;
- Making efforts to acquire or practice with weapons;
- Surveilling possible sites and areas for attack;
- Testing access to potential targets;
- Rehearsing attacks or ambushes.

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates* (2002).

Key Investigative Questions

5. **Does the person have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?**
   - How organized is the person's thinking and behavior?
   - Does the person have the means (e.g., access to a weapon) to carry out an attack?
   - Are they trying to get the means to carry out an attack?
   - Do actions indicate their belief in their ability?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002). *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*

Key Investigative Questions

6. Is the person experiencing hopelessness, desperation, and/or despair?

- Is there information to suggest that the person is feeling desperation and/or despair?
- Has the person experienced a recent failure, loss and/or loss of status?
- Is the person having difficulty coping with a stressful event?
- Has the person engaged in behavior that suggests that he or she has considered ending their life?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002). *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*

Key Investigative Questions

7. Does the person have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible person?

- Does the person have at least one friend, colleague, family member, or other person that he or she trusts and can rely upon?
- Is the person emotionally connected to other people?
- Has the person previously come to someone's attention or raised concern in a way that suggested he or she needs intervention or supportive services?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002). *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*

Key Investigative Questions

8. Does the person see violence as an acceptable, desirable – or the only – way to solve a problem?

- Does the setting around the person (friends, fellow guests, colleagues, others) explicitly or implicitly support or endorse violence as a way of resolving problems or disputes?
- Has the person been "dared" by others to engage in an act of violence?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002).
Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates

Key Investigative Questions

9. Are the person's conversation and "story" consistent with his or her actions?

- Does information from collateral interviews and from the person's own behavior confirm or dispute what the person says is going on?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002). *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*

Key Investigative Questions

10. Are other people concerned about the person's potential for violence?

- Are those who know the person concerned that he or she might take action based on violent ideas or plans?
- Are those who know the person concerned about a specific target?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002). *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*

Key Investigative Questions

11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of an attack?

- What factors in the person's life may increase or decrease the likelihood that the person will engage in violent behavior?
- What is the response of others who know about the person's ideas or plans?
  - Actively discourage person from acting violently,
  - Encourage the person to attack,
  - Deny the possibility of violence,
  - Passively collude with an attack, etc.?

Source: U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education, (2002). *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates*

Key Investigative Questions

12. **Where does the subject exist along the pathway to violence?** Has the subject:
    - Developed an idea or plan to do harm?
    - Taken steps toward implementing the plan?
    - Developed the capacity or means to carry out the plan?
    - How fast are they moving toward engaging in harm?
    - Where can the team intervene to move the person off that pathway toward harm?

Source: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, (2002). *Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and Creating Safe School Climates.*

Assessment Tools

Utilize appropriate, objective, instruments:

- Spousal Risk Assessment Guide (SARA);
- Violence Risk Assessment Guide (VRAG);
- Cawood / White Assessment Grid;
- MOSAIC;
- Classification of Violence Risk (COVR);
- Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk (WAVR-21).

Note: This is a partial listing of such instruments and not an endorsement of any particular approach.

Assessment Tools

Appropriate use of instruments:

- Avoid reliance on instrument only;
- Ensure evaluator is properly trained;
- Ensure that instrument is reliable and valid;
- Be aware of limitations of the instrument;
- Stay current with new data and versions;
- Integrate information with structured professional judgment.

Source: *Risk Assessment Guideline Elements for Violence* Association of Threat Assessment Professionals.

Evaluate Person/Situation

1. Does the person pose a threat of harm, whether to himself, to others, or both? Is he or she is on a pathway toward harm?

- Developed an idea or plan to do harm?
- Taken any steps toward implementing the plan?
- Developed the capacity or means to carry out the plan?
- How fast are they moving toward engaging in harm?
- Where can the team intervene to move the person off that pathway toward harm?

Evaluate Person/Situation

2. If not, does the person otherwise show a need for help or intervention?

Assessment: Case Priority Levels

PRIORITY 1 (Extreme Risk): Poses clear/immediate threat of violence or self-harm and requires immediate containment, law enforcement involvement, target protection, and case management plan.

PRIORITY 2 (High Risk): Poses threat of violence or self-harm but lacks immediacy or access to target. Requires active monitoring and case management plan.

PRIORITY 3 (Moderate Risk): Does not pose threat of violence or self harm, but exhibits significantly disruptive behaviors and/or need for assistance. Requires active monitoring, case management plan, and appropriate referrals.

PRIORITY 4 (Low Risk): Does not pose threat of violence or self-harm at this time, but may exhibit some disruptive behavior and/or need for assistance. Requires passive monitoring. Utilize case management and referrals as appropriate.

PRIORITY 5 (No Identified Risk): Does not pose threat of violence or self-harm nor is there evidence of disruption to community. No case management or monitoring required.

Goal of Threat Assessment

The primary goal of Threat Assessment & Management is the **safety** of all persons involved.

Counseling, support, confrontation, termination, arrest, prosecution, etc., are tools to reach that goal.

Case Management

Develop an **individualized** plan based on information gathered in the investigation and other facts known about the person.

- Case management is more art than science.
- Plan must be fact-based and person-specific.
- Engagement can be critical, even when dealing with someone who is very angry.
- Distancing makes monitoring and intervention more difficult.
- Intervener skills & personalities matter.

Case Management Options

Effective case management incorporates interventions in each of the (relevant) factors:

S De-escalate, contain, or control the **subject** who may take violent action;

T Decrease vulnerabilities of the **target**;

E Modify physical and cultural **environment** to discourage escalation; and,

P Prepare for & mitigate against **precipitating events** that may trigger adverse reactions.

Case Management Options

Implement appropriate strategies:

- No action;
- Monitoring:
  - Active – seek out information;
  - Passive – dependent on further reports;
- Case management / Interventions:
  - Subject;
  - Target;
  - Environment & systemic conditions;
  - Precipitating events.

Subject-Based Strategies

Implement appropriate strategies:

- Utilize less intrusive measures first;
  - Driven by effective case management vs.
  - Documentation & liability management.
- Maintain channel of communication and information gathering (with subject).
- Subject interview;
  - De-escalate, contain, or control subject.
- Subject referral for assistance;
- Subject confrontation or warning;

Relationship Management

Utilize key relationships (with subject) as channel of communication for:

- Information gathering;
- Intervention.

Subject Control Strategies

Third-party control or intervention:

- Disciplinary review;
- Suspension;
- Termination / Expulsion;
- No Contact / Trespass notice;
- Civil no-contact order;
- Mental health committal;
- Arrest.

"When your only tool is a hammer . . . ";

Subject Control Strategies

Leave, suspension, or termination options that focus solely on controlling the person do not solve the long-term problem of:

- Moving person away from thoughts and plans of violence;
- Connecting them to resources;
- Providing options once person is no longer connected to campus.

Target Management Strategies

Coaching regarding personal safety approaches

- Clear statements to subject:
  - Relationship/contact is unwanted
  - Stop all contact and/or communication
- Avoid subsequent contact / response
  - Document all further contacts
- Minimize public information
- Maintain awareness of surroundings
  - Vary routine
- Develop contingency plans
  - Escape / shelter, support
- Utilize support sytems

Strategies for Victims

- Changing phone or email;
  - Help minimize contact;
  - Decrease disruption / fear;

  - Decrease warning of escalation / threat;
  - May escalate stalker to direct contact;

Protective Orders

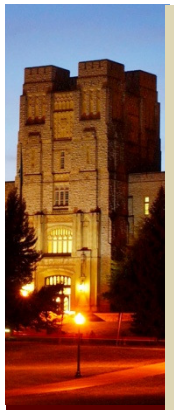
- Not a universal protection;
- Can limit behaviors of some stalkers;
  - Social controlled and responsive to limits;
- Minimal deterrence with fixated stalkers;
  - Psychotic stalkers may not understand;
- May escalate stalking and violence;
  - Careful of false sense of security;

Fear Management

FEAR management is a larger component than THREAT management.

"Fear of danger is 10,000 times more terrifying than danger itself."

- Daniel Defoe
from *Robinson Crusoe*

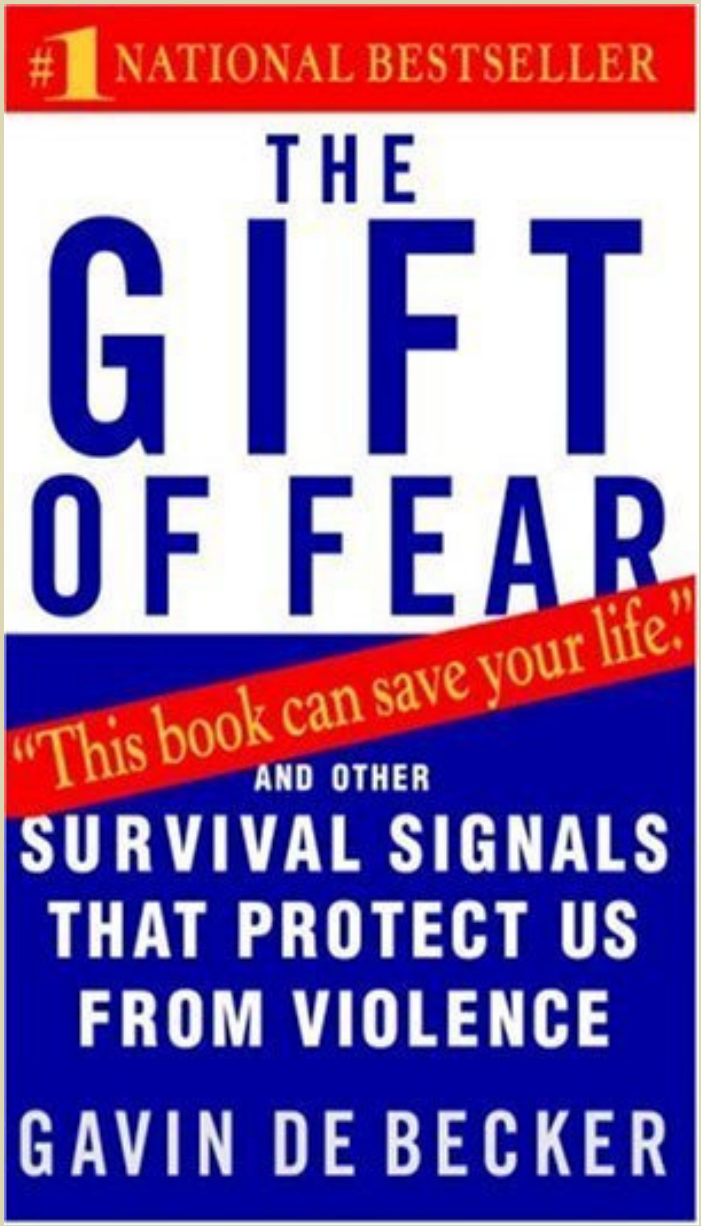


Managing the Fear

What victims want:

- Care;
- Certainty;
- Consistency;
- Communication;

- Gavin de Becker
"The Gift of Fear"



Assisting Victims

- Refer to support services;
- Help obtain housing or work relocation;
- Help change telephone number;
- Provide cellular telephone;
- Provide escort/surveillance;
- Conduct welfare checks;
- Evaluate access control;
- Evaluate environmental design for safety.

Environmental Management Options

- Address systemic, policy or procedural problems that may serve as triggering conditions
- Bullying prevention/intervention programs
- Enhance campus climate – caring community
- Intervene with associates that support violent behavior
- Enhance conflict management skills

Managing Potential Trigger Events

Monitor and manage precipitating events:

- Loss (real, perceived, or anticipated)
  - Job or income;
  - Loss of status;
  - Significant other;
- Perceived rejection;
- Perceived injustice;
- Ostracized by others;
- Health problems;
- Violation of a court order.

Times of Increased Risk

Increased risk during “dramatic moments”:

- Changes in relationship or residence status;
- Arrests;
- Issuance of protective orders;
- Court hearings;
- Custody hearings;
- Anniversary dates;
- Family-oriented holidays.

Implement, Monitor, Follow Up

- Once the plan is developed, it needs to be implemented and monitored.
- Team should include implementation and monitoring responsibilities as part of the case management plan.
- Further referrals may be necessary.
- Team should continue to follow up as necessary.
- Can close the case once threat level has been reduced for an acceptable period of time.

Closing a Case

Threat management cases generally:

Remain open until the person in question is no longer reasonably assessed to pose a threat or in need of case management and/or monitoring.

Closing a Case

While the case is open the team should:

- Continue to monitor and modify the plan as long as the individual still poses a threat
- Recognize that a person can continue to pose a threat even after he/she ceases to be a member of the campus community
- Continue to monitor the situation through its relationship with local law enforcement agencies and mental health agencies, as well as in direct cooperation with the person, if possible

What Rules May Apply?

- Federal Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act;
- State public accommodations laws / disability-related employment laws;
- Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act;
- Federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act ("HIPAA");
- State Patient-Health Care Professional Privileges;

Information Sharing: FERPA

- FERPA is <u>not</u> an impediment to effective threat assessment and case management.
- FERPA governs records only, not observations, communications, etc.
- FERPA does not govern police records.
  - If created & maintained by law enforcement, for law enforcement purpose.
- New guidance from ED encourages information sharing where public safety is a concern.
- FERPA does not permit a private right of action.

Information Sharing: HIPAA

- Check with legal counsel as to which laws govern counseling center records.
- Confidentiality is held by client, not MH provider.
- In cases where privacy laws apply, can try these strategies:
  - No legal prohibition against providing information to health/MH professionals.
  - Inquire about *Tarasoff* - type duty.
  - Ask subject for permission to disclose.

Record Keeping

- Centralized incident tracking database;
- Document reports and actions - include date, time, subjects, targets, behaviors of concern, witnesses;
  - Data;
  - Assessment;
  - Plan;
- Preserve evidence: Keep copies of email, memos, etc.

Record Keeping

Incident tracking database;

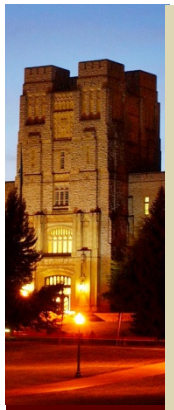
- Incident Information:
  - Date, location, nature of incident, means of approach;
- Subject information:
  - Name, DOB, sex, description, affiliation, status, etc.
- Target / Victim Information;
  - Name, DOB, sex, description, affiliation, status, etc.
- Witness/Reporting Party Information:
  - Name, DOB, sex, description, affiliation, status, etc.

Common Problems and Solutions

- Turnover of faculty and staff, as well as students.
  - Systematized training and awareness
- Information flow.
  - Understanding privacy laws
  - Regular team interaction, not just during crisis
  - Clear direction from university leadership on need/importance of information sharing.
- Perceived/real lack of authority to make decisions.
  - Clear delineation of leadership within team.

Common Problems and Solutions

- Lack of training/inappropriate training.
  - Scrutinize training vendors for experience, credibility, best practices.
  - Consult with colleagues at other institutions.
- Complicated/cumbersome/redundant processes.
  - Use what the institution already has.
  - Capitalize on what already fits/works.
- Cottage industry hype.
  - Look for approaches that are based on best practices, administered by accomplished personnel, AND that meet your institution's needs.



For Further Information

Gene Deisinger, Ph.D.

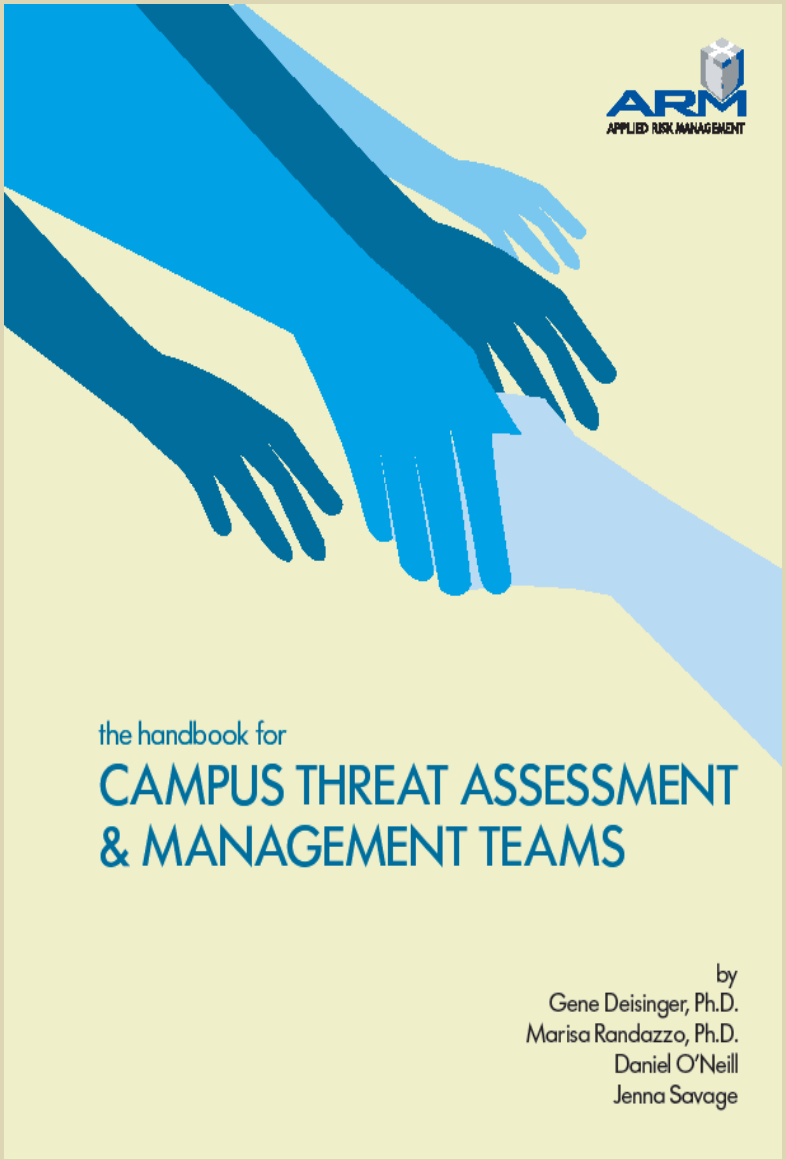
Deputy Chief of Police &

Director, Threat Management

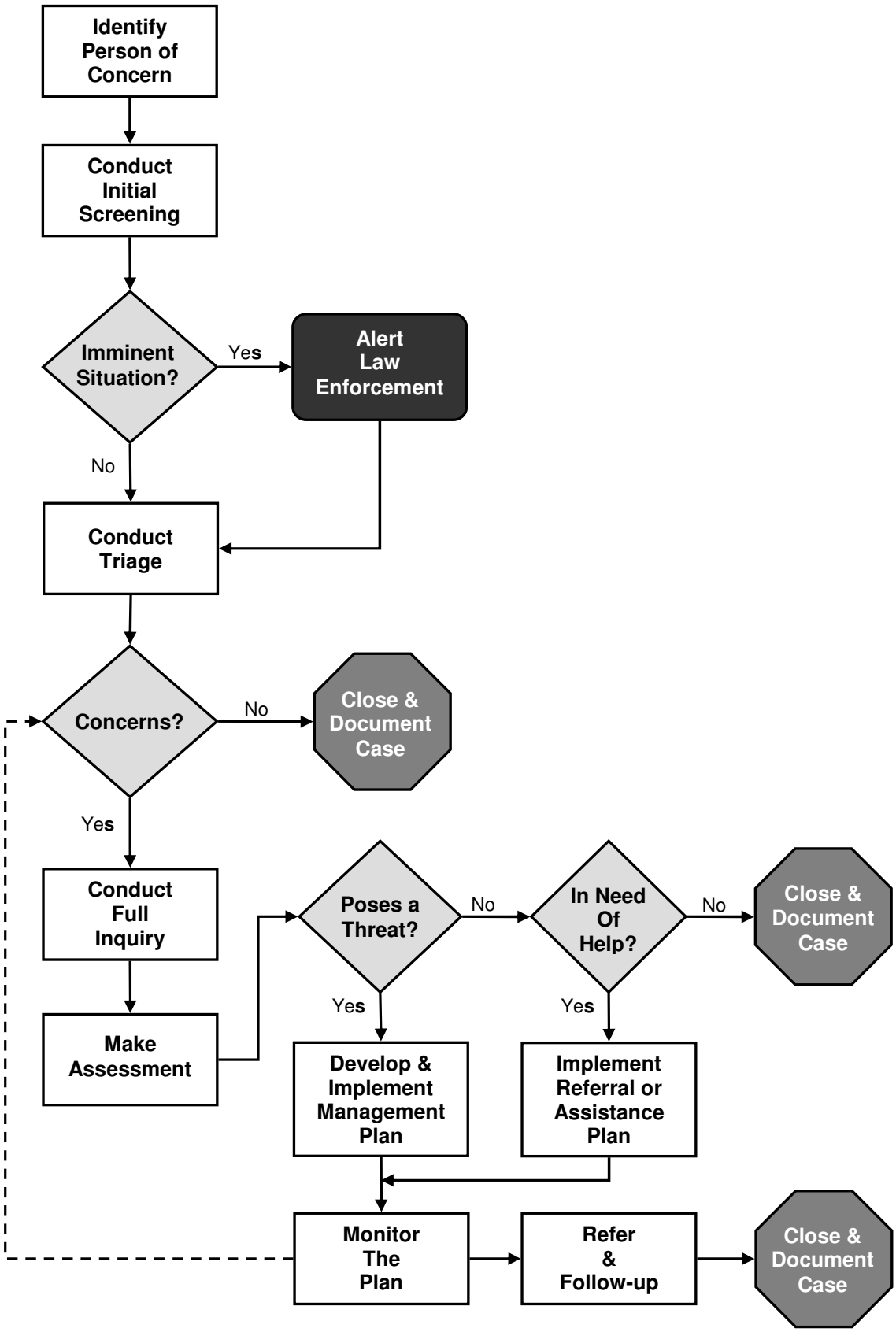
Virginia Tech

Email: erdeisin@vt.edu

Phone: 540-231-5123



Threat Assessment and Management Process



© Gene Deisinger, Ph.D. & M. Randazzo, Ph.D. (2008)