

D·PREP

Training and Consulting
Services for Disaster Preparation
and Critical Incident Response

Moving Beyond the Red Flags: Overcoming Obstacles and Managing Threat



Types of Violence



AFFECTIVE VIOLENCE

- Emotional reaction
- Based on situations and environmental stress
- Driven by adrenaline
- Lacks forethought or planning
- Can Be seen in FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE

TARGETED VIOLENCE

- Non-emotional reaction
- Deliberate planning (weeks-months-years)
- Based in perceived/actual grievance
- Willing to sacrifice life for cause

Types of Threat

Howlers

Do not engage in approach behaviors and lack the intent to carry out their threats. When howlers threaten, their threats are TRANSIENT.



Hunters

Engage in serious targeted violence, and their intent is to complete the attack. They do not draw attention to themselves by making threats, so when hunters threaten, the threats are considered SUBSTANTIVE.



TRANSIENT THREATS

These types of threats do not express lasting intent to harm.



SUBSTANTIVE THREATS

These threats represent a continued attempt to harm someone.

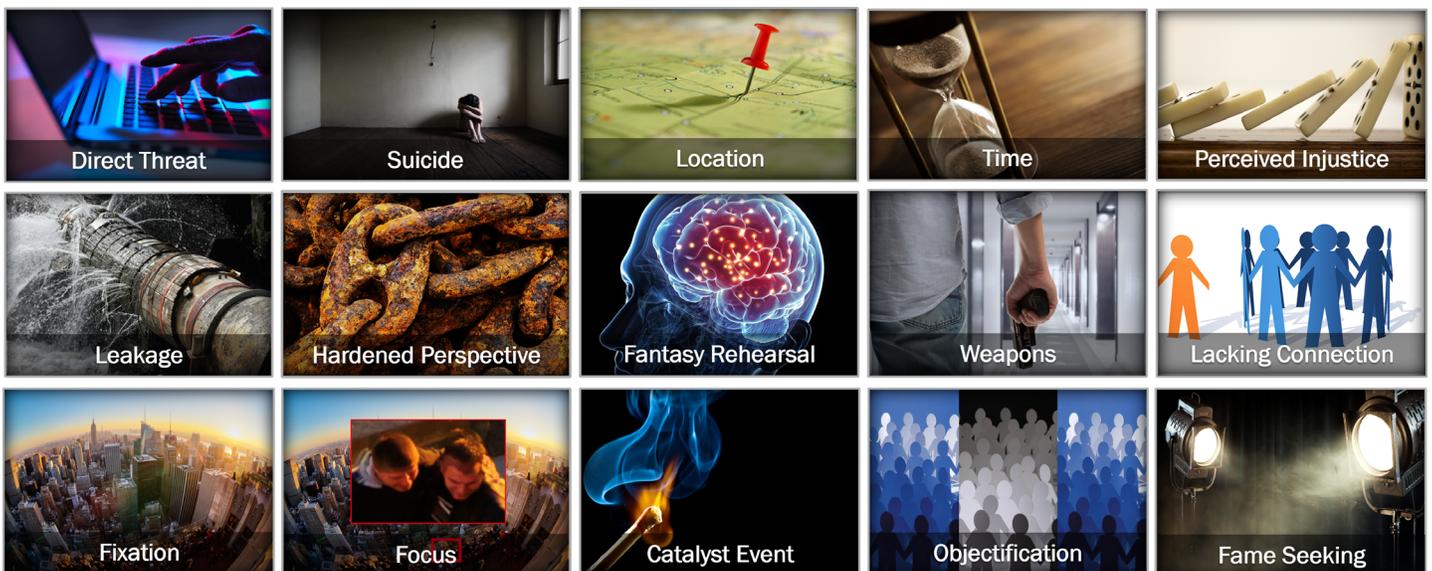
TYPE OF THREAT	EXAMPLE
Direct	"I'm going to blow up the library."
Indirect/Vague	"Something bad is going to happen to the library."
Direct w/action/time imperative	"I'm going to blow up the library Tuesday at 3.
Conditional ultimatum	"If you don't give me a good grade, I'm going to blow up the library."
Transient	Frustrated about an assignment, a student throws a book and yells, "Burn this down!"
Substantive	"I'm going to bring a nalgene bottle of gasoline to spread on these books and light it up."
Howling	"You can't treat me like this. I'm going to set fire to the world and roast marshmallows!"
Hunting	"I have what I need. I know what I'm going to do. #fire #library"
Vague but direct	"Something bad is happening in the library soon."
Direct but vague	"They might want to invest in fire extinguishers around here."

Risk Factors

Risk factors identify the personality traits, behavioral indicators, social and peer interactions, environmental stressors, threats, acquisition of or access to lethal means, and other contextual clues that have been noted in those who move forward with a targeted attack plan.

A key aspect of understanding risk factors is the importance of seeing these in combination, like puzzle pieces coming together to create a larger meaning. As with a puzzle, one piece alone is not particularly useful. It's when these pieces combine that the factors begin to be more useful in understanding risk.

When conducting a violence risk assessment (VRA), one should avoid emphasizing any single risk factor, such as weapons access or mental illness, without regard to the context of other risk factors.



Risk Factors for Targeted, Predatory, Mission-Oriented Violence

1. **Actionability** is the term used to describe if an individual has access to means and materials to carry out an attack. While firearms present a high level of concern, the VRA should determine if a potential attacker has access to any weapons, not just firearms.
2. A **hardened point of view** is a locked and fixed way of seeing the world that is resistant to other counterpoints. The individual holds a strong investment tied to these beliefs and they are often unwilling or unable to shift from these ideas.
3. **Drivenness and a justification for violent action** describe an attacker who is dedicated to committing violence in the name of a particular cause. As they escalate on the pathway to violence, they morally disengage from any external ethical or moral standards, objectify their target, and focus on mission completion.
4. **Grievance or injustice collection** takes on a dangerous characteristic where the grievance or injustice becomes a justification for violence. These grievances are most often held against those in positions of power. The attacker holds them responsible for real or imagined unfairness and difficulties.
5. Most attackers are **suicidal**. They express indifference toward life, hopelessness, and a lack of confidence about the future. They feel disempowered, misunderstood, and lost.
6. **Mental illness** can be an aggravating factor when conducted at VRA, particularly when related to thought disorders, depression, and bi-polar disorder. Most of those who carry out attacks experience psychological, behavioral, or developmental symptoms.
7. The **use of substances**, particularly stimulants, impacts decision making, increases isolation, fosters disengagement, and reduces impulse control. Drug or substance use, particularly methamphetamines or amphetamines, cocaine, or alcohol, has been connected to both affective and targeted violence.
8. Many who engage in targeted violence experience an inability to understand different perspectives. This **lack of empathy and remorse for actions** is an aggravating factor in a violence risk threat assessment.
9. When potential attackers experience frustrations, pain or feel overwhelmed, they engage in **fantasy rehearsals** to reduce their anxiety. These fantasies involve them confronting, punishing and/or destroying the target of their perceived injustices.
10. Feelings of **isolation and hopelessness** are common among those who plan targeted violence. They may experience a lack of social or advancement opportunities at home, school, or work. Most experience chronic isolation and/or an inability to create or maintain sexual or intimate relationships with others.
11. Many attackers have felt **marginalized** and expressed despair and hopelessness about a better tomorrow. This results in a perceived threat to those they identify with, causing a sense of moral outrage.



1. A **fascination with violence** is a risk factor that at least half of those experience while planning their attacks. When engaged in a VRA, there should be a careful exploration of the subject's investment, obsession, or fixation on violence. This could include studying past attacks, watching media that shows sensationalized violence against particular groups, drawing pictures or writing essays with similar themes.
2. The **desire for fame** is present as a motivating factor for this kind of targeted violence. Those who feel marginalized, bullied, teased, or isolated expressed a desire for attention and seek retribution for this perceived injustice.
3. As part of the escalation on the pathway, attackers often engage in **objectification and depersonalization** toward their target. They may use hostile language, insulting, images or diminishing/misogynistic objectification focused on separating themselves from their target.

Environmental Factors

1. **Catalyst events** occur when there is a significant loss that occurs in a person's life that causes an escalation in attacker planning. This could be anything the person holds dear in their life such as failing a particularly important class, losing a romantic relationship, being fired from a job, being involved in domestic abuse, drug use, or criminal charges, or the death of a close friend or family member.
2. The experience of **teasing and bullying** are additional escalating factors for the attacker. Bullying and teasing may be physical, social, property, or cyber. About 1/3 of attackers in their study engaged in bullying, often as part of a persistent pattern of behavior which lasted for weeks, months, or years.
3. **Free fall** describes a wide range of problems an attacker may experience in their community, school, work, primary support group, and/or social circle. For those in a free fall, there is little hope for improvement and this often leads to further isolation, suicidality and feelings of despair. As problems spiral (conflicts in the home, academic, legal or disciplinary actions, or other personal issues), there is little preventing them from looking for an escape.
4. When there is a rapid or intense **decrease in academic or work progress**, this can be a catalyst event and lead to further escalation. In many attack cases, the loss of academic or workplace connection becomes the final straw that overwhelms the individual and moves them closer to an attack. Failure to progress in work and school can directly contribute to other areas of life beginning to become unstable.
5. The **social isolation** that occurs when the person has vastly different beliefs from the majority and/or when they see increases in teasing and bullying, is another cause for escalation. This isolation makes the potential attacker feel alone in their thinking and that violence as the only way to be seen. This isolation is often observed by those around the attacker as they isolate themselves, withdrawing from others, appearing sad, or crying.

Protective Factors

- 1. Environmental and Emotional Stability:** Environmental and emotional stability occur when an individual's life experiences have consistency and constancy, and their reactions to change or crisis represent a similar calm and resilience. This is an indication that there are less elements pulling them toward creating disruption in the status quo through violent action. Here, the overall environment in which the person operates is positive without dramatic shifts. The person has stable employment and/or academic enrollment, and they are engaged in these professional or academic arenas. There have not been recent terminations or suspensions, and the family or home environment is generally stable and healthy. The person is not challenged by instability in their situation. They are connected and progressing toward academic or professional goals.
- 2. Social Health and Connection:** A second protective factor relates to stability in relationships with family, friends, and significant others. The person feels socially connected in healthy and positive ways. They feel safe in their own skin, and do not feel marginalized or discriminated against based on their identity or identity group. They are surrounded by others where they can be themselves, feel accepted, and are not judged for their beliefs or circumstance. They feel emotionally connected to those around them which girds against a desire to harm or threaten.
- 3. Access to Non-Violent Outlets:** Having access to alternative, non-violent courses of action is an important protective factor. Individuals have opportunities for positive collective action on issues and concerns instead of turning to violence. Especially when considering written threat, it's important to consider if this is someone seeking a safe space to communicate and discuss issues of concern or radical ideas about improving the way the world works.
- 4. Empathy and Connection:** The empathetic or compassionate person demonstrates the ability to consider other's perspectives or other's ideals without seeing them as challenging or competitive to his or her own beliefs. This can manifest itself as tolerance and an appreciation of diverse perspectives as well. Empathy can be experienced when thinking about people who live differently than us, engaging with other cultures and confronting our own biases, as well as learning to listen to other's perspectives and collaborating with them.
- 5. Positive Social and Individual Action:** Here, we see someone who is engaged in positive social action for the betterment of a group or community or even at a lesser developmental place of just positive action for the sake of their own individual consequence. The second is fairly simple. This individual has an awareness of how their choices result in positive or negative consequence minimally for themselves or those in their circle, and thus, chooses actions to avoid harm. On a higher level, positive social action includes a more inclusive and collaborative participation working together to improve situations, remove barriers to success, and foster positive change. This level of critical thinking, awareness of others, and inclusivity truly reflect the opposite of violent action and the risk factors.



Collaborative Teams

Siloing occurs when departments or individuals hold onto information in isolation, without working collaboratively. These isolated communications occur when each department focuses on their own individual mission, policy, and rules without seeing themselves as part of a larger, more complex system. Communications that focus primarily on a single department to the detriment of seeing threat assessment and behavioral intervention as larger, community-based approaches are said to be operating in a “silo.” Much like the tall grain silos that are spotted throughout the Midwest, they are single structures serving their function, separated from the larger overall system.



All CARE/BIT work needs to offer something different from a “one and done” approach to risk assessment. Our work needs to be built on a model that takes into account the dynamic nature of risk.



CARE teams are not punitive in their approach, but rather preventative and focused on connecting those at risk to resources and moving them from the pathway of violence to social integration and support.



A mental health assessment is primarily about giving a diagnosis, assessing the level of care (does the student need to be hospitalized) and developing a treatment plan to reducing mental illness symptoms.

A violence risk or threat assessment is informed by workplace violence literature and primarily focused on assessing the likelihood of the subject behaving violently in the future and taking steps to reduce that risk.



Look for vulnerabilities to your security:

- Where might you be targeted?
- How might you be attacked?
- How would your protective measures fare?
- What is the possible magnitude of an attack?

Having done penetration testing and patched vulnerabilities, bring someone new in to find holes or lapses.



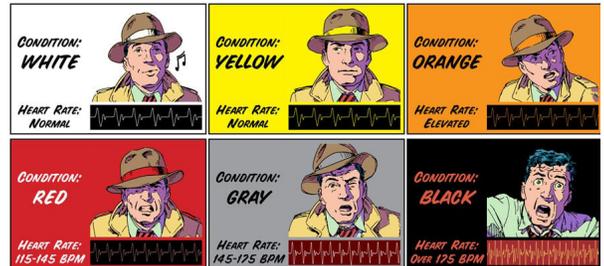
The OODA Loop Observe | Orient | Decide | Act



Observe at Condition Yellow

For situational awareness, be at “relaxed alert.” Use all your senses to take in your surroundings.

If you are nervous or stressed, you are more likely to have a narrow focus and miss something. Or you may draw attention to yourself. Practice your observation skills and memorizing information like license plate.



Orient: Baseline, Goals, and Action Plans

While observing the area, what should you look for? First, establish a baseline for what would be normal in a given situation, then watch for anything that deviates from that baseline. Watch for people who are acting overly dominant, either more or less comfortable than others, or more or less interested in the surroundings.

Use what you have observed to make a plan of action. Seconds matter, so having a plan before the threat manifests. Consider your position in the room relative to where the threat might come from. Have an exit strategy and look for items that might be useful barricades or weapons.



Decide on Your Course of Action

Here, using what you have observed and the plans you develop, decide on the best course of action. In an active threat, consider the principles of run, hide, fight as covered on the next page. This decision must be made quickly, so the more you practice SA, the better equipped you will be.



Act Quickly and Decisively

Whatever action you decide is best, take it quickly and with determination. It can be as simple as crossing the street to avoid passing a dark alley or as crucial as running from an active shooting situation. You may only have seconds to save your life or avoid other harm.

Make a Referral



Counseling



Career Services



Health Care



Academic
Support



Faculty



Coaching Staff



Parents



Disability
Services



Case
Management



Residence Life

Documentation



Don't Be Lavish



Don't Be Sparse



Avoid Technical Language



Beware Emotions



Notes create a history of our analysis and efforts to help the student.



By keeping timely, well-written, non-technical case notes free of emotion, you offer an accurate history of your efforts.



Others can pick up your work where you left off and there is a legal defensibility in well-kept notes to demonstrate your good practice.

After Action Process

Start with the idea that rank should be left at the door to encourage everyone to share their ideas openly without fear of being shut down. This concept is easier said than done, so its reliant on the BIT/CARE team leader or chair to develop these relations with the team prior to an important after-action report. Create a process free of a firm time limit or pressure to accomplish the task before it is really done. There is no perfect. We are here to find ways to improve our process. This is not about personal blame, but rather how to improve our process.

Be aware of leading questions or displaying bias. For example, instead of asking “Do you think the police overreacted a bit when the student discussed their sexual impulses?,” ask “What are your thoughts on how the police reacted when the student discussed their sexual impulses?”

Questions to consider:

1. Magic wand question: What would have helped to prevent the event from occurring?
 - Consider physical security measures.
 - Consider communication and passing information among the community.
2. Did your impression of the case change from your initial review to now? Did new information come up during the case that changed your mind? Did you review this case with a skeptical inquisitive mindset? Do you feel you could have asked more questions, or dug deeper?
3. What information, if known earlier, could have helped? What changes could be put into place that would help make that occur in the future?
4. Was communication before the event handled in a multi-disciplinary and collaborative manner? If not, how can this be improved?
5. What assessments were conducted and what interventions did they lead to?
 - Were these the correct assessments for the case at hand?
 - Did the person(s) performing the assessment have access to all the information they needed?
 - Did the information shared from the assessment get to the correct people?
 - Was the assessment repeated as needed or seen as a one-and-done?
 - Were there lethality restrictions put into place after the assessment (e.g., securing weapons in household)?
6. What external factors impacted the event that could be planned around in the future? These might include:
 - Access to information (charts, student history, school layout/schematics)
 - Communication systems (cellular, intercom, inter-office phone)
 - Access to key personal or decision makers
 - Vacation or leave for key personal led to breakdown
 - Failure to move on information in a timely way
7. What barriers or obstacles could/should have been in place to prevent the event from happening? These might include:
 - Siloed/limited communication between departments
 - Siloed/limited communication with parents, off-site providers, coaches, advisors, employers, hospitals, police
 - Mental health or psychological assessment rather than broader violence risk assessment
 - Assessment completed, but information not shared to right people

The D-Prep Safety Division trains K-12 schools, colleges, universities, law enforcement, and workplace on issues related to threat assessment, crisis preparedness, crisis response, emergency operations, behavioral intervention, mental health, diversity, equity and inclusion.

Each of our offerings can be customized to your institution and your specific training needs. Most can be offered in person, live online, or as asynchronous online courses.

- Addressing Disruptive and Dangerous Behavior in the Classroom
- Crisis Media Training
- Critical Issues in Campus Safety
- How Worried Should I Be? Understanding Social Media, Email, and Student Writing
- Impact vs. Intent: Understanding Microaggressions and Bias
- K-12 Threat Assessment: Standards and Best Practices for Behavioral Intervention Teams
- MERIT Active Shooter Response
- Managing Mental Illness in the Classroom
- Situational Awareness
- State Mandated Comprehensive School Site Safety Plan Training
- Tackling Teasing and Bullying through Bystander Empowerment
- Understanding the Complexities of Student Release & Reunification
- And many more...

Visit dprepsafety.com for more information



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After retiring from his 27-year career in law enforcement, Jeff most recently served as the director of operations for Secure Community Network. Prior to that, he was the vice president of safety initiatives for TNG. Jeff is a nationally recognized expert in school safety. Jeff previously served on the Advisory Board National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment (NABITA) and as part of their Threat Institute faculty.