



# **NORTH EAST SCHOOL DIVISION**

**VTRA: A School Threat Assessment Team Handbook**

## ***General Information and Guidelines***

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## Violence Threat Risk Assessment – Overview

Threat Assessment is the process of determining if a threat-maker actually poses a risk to a target or targets they have threatened. Many individuals engage in threat-making behaviour but, fortunately, few pose a real risk.

The Canadian Center for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (CCTRA) utilizes a four step approach to Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA):

1. Identification of worrisome or threatening behaviour;
2. Use of a multi-disciplinary team to conduct violence threat risk assessment;
3. Determining if a threat-maker poses a risk;
4. Intervening appropriately.

A VTRA process does not use a profile or checklist of behaviours to identify a person who may be on the pathway to violence. Rather, it is a focus on when an individual engages in threat-making or worrisome behaviour. At this point, the person making the observation initiates the Stage 1 VTRA process.

## Key Components of VTRA

### Threat Assessment Trumps Suspension

In most cases, unless the individual of concern already poses an imminent or obvious safety concern (ie: currently brandishing a weapon), the Stage 1 team is activated and Stage 1 Report Form data is collected within reason before suspension is even considered.

**A poorly timed “out of school suspension” is high risk as this period is often viewed by the high risk student as the “last straw”.** It is in this stage that many threat makers decide to finalize a plan to terrorize their school or attack a specific target (this can include homicidal or suicidal acts).

The suspension does not cause the violence to occur but may create the necessary context for the high risk student who is already struggling with suicidal and/or homicidal ideation, to take the final step from planning to action.

### **Unauthored Threats: Assessment and Intervention**

Unauthored threats are typically threats to commit a violent act against an individual, specific group or site (ie: the school). They may be found written on bathroom walls or stalls, spray painted on the side of schools, posted on the internet, letters left in a conspicuous place (teacher's desk), etc. The lack of ownership (authorship) of the threat generally denotes a lack of commitment. Nevertheless, there are steps that should be followed:

- 1) Assess the unauthored threat.
- 2) Attempt to identify the threat maker.
- 3) Avoid or minimize the crisis/trauma response.

### **Students with Special Needs and VTRA**

The multidisciplinary VTRA protocol will not be activated when students with intensive needs engage in threat-making or aggressive behaviors **that are typical to their baseline**. In other words, if their conduct is consistent with their diagnosis and how it has been known to manifest in them, then the VTRA team will not be called upon to conduct an assessment.

However, if the student with intensive needs moves beyond their typical baseline and for the first time engaged in threatening behavior, then the VTRA team would be activated to assist in determining why the increase in baseline and if there is a risk to self and others. Once the VTRA team is activated the process of data collection and assessment is not modified other than to ensure appropriate interviewing strategies with the student with intensive needs. Staff members from the school and division level responsible for program planning and service delivery to students with intensive needs will always be consultants to the VTRA team in these cases.

## Membership on School Threat Assessment Teams

### School Violence-Threat Assessment Team (School TAT)

The School TAT will consist of principal, vice-principal, school counselor, teacher and an assigned RCMP member. The School TAT participants should have received threat assessment training and will respond after the immediate threat to student/staff safety has been contained. The School team will assess whether a risk to student/staff safety still exists and develop an intervention plan to support student(s) involved, the greater student body, staff and the community. The Superintendent or designate will be consulted and will participate in the threat assessment process as required.

**Stage 1 Data collection and immediate risk reducing interventions** are performed by the school-based team (School Threat Assessment Team or TAT), which must, **at minimum**, include the school principal or vice principal, school counsellor, and the assigned RCMP member. The initial data collection is completed in a timely and efficient manner. It focuses on gathering case specific data using the *Threat Assessment Report Form* (See Appendix C).

## Community Threat Assessment Team (Community TAT)

When a School TAT has determined that a student poses a **medium or high level of concern** to student/staff safety, the principal will call the Superintendent or designate to request that the Community TAT be activated.

The Community TAT will consist of the School team members as well as designated Division Office staff and appropriate Community Partners. When the Community TAT has been activated, the respective RCMP detachment will be consulted.

When a community partner agency identifies the need to activate the Community TAT, they will notify the chair of CTAT. Community TAT members will, at all times, take any actions necessary to facilitate immediate safety, without delay, regardless of the involvement or availability of other Community TAT members.

**Stage 2 Comprehensive multidisciplinary risk evaluation** is focused on further data collection beyond the initial data set obtained by the Stage I School TAT. The Stage 2 Community Threat Assessment Team (Community TAT) may involve some or all of the following: additional police-based resources, psychology, psychiatry, mental health, child protection, young offender worker, and others.

At Stage 2, the Community TAT members work in collaboration with the Stage 1 School TAT to conduct the formal risk assessment and evaluation. Stage 2 includes the use of formal, structured professional instruments, concepts, tests, and measures by the appropriate community agency(ies).

**Stage 3 Multidisciplinary intervention** is the formal meeting of the Stage 1 School TAT and Stage 2 Community TAT members following a formal threat/risk assessment. The purpose of Stage 3 is to develop and implement a comprehensive, multidisciplinary intervention and management strategy.

## Roles

### School principal or designate

*The school principal or designate will:*

- Be the School TAT leader;
- Call and coordinate the School TAT and inform the Superintendent of Student Services or designate;
- Complete Stage I: Data collection and immediate risk reducing intervention within hours;
- Complete Stage I **Threat Assessment Form in CLEVR** (*All tabs up to and including Step 10 in VTRA*) within 24 hours;
- Contact the Superintendent of Student Services or designate to discuss possible activation of the Community TAT;
- Follow up and coordinate intervention plans developed by the team;
- Notify Superintendent or designate once the plan has been developed via the email function in CLEVR.

### Counselling Consultant and other staff involved at the Principal's request

*The school staff will:*

- Assist in data gathering as assigned by the principal;
- Assist the principal in Steps 6 – 10 of the Threat Assessment Report Form
- Be available for consultation on general issues regarding threat assessment procedures relating to mental health;
- Assist in developing plans or other interventions (i.e., behaviour plans, safety plans), and in facilitating access to programs or resources to reduce the risk of violence and respond to the student's educational needs; and
- Help families access support that is required.

### Division Office staff

*Division Office staff will:*

- Be designated by the Superintendent with responsibility for VTRA as members of the Community TAT;
- Contact Community TAT members to facilitate consultations, and conduct interviews as required, except in criminal investigations;
- Assist when asked in completing the Threat Assessment Report Form Questions Steps 1-11; and
- Follow up with School TAT on the implementation of recommended intervention plans as outlined in Step 11

### **Community Partner Staff**

*The community partner staff will:*

- Have an appropriate staff member participate in the Community TAT;

*The community partner staff may:*

- Participate in completion of the Threat Assessment Report Form;
- Participate in a review of School TAT findings; and
- Participate in developing any recommended intervention plans as outlined in Step 11 of the CLEVR VTRA form

### **RCMP Officers**

*The RCMP Officer will:*

- Be involved in School TATs and/or Community TATs;

*The RCMP Officer may:*

- Investigate and determine whether a crime has been committed, and if charges are appropriate or warranted;
- Conduct a police investigation;
- Generate a police occurrence report; and
- Interview the threat maker and witnesses when a criminal offence has occurred.

In most cases, the student behaviour that activates the Community TAT will be observed in, or affect, the school. Therefore, whenever possible, Community TAT meetings will occur on North East School Division premises. The lead Community TAT member will be the Superintendent with responsibility for VTRA or designate. Other senior divisional personnel and school administration, may also be part of the Community TAT.

**Trauma Response:** After a threat or an act of violence has occurred, school division Tragic Events Response Team and community partner staff may be called upon to plan or provide post trauma counselling and interventions for students and staff.

## North East Community Threat Assessment and Support Protocol

The North East School Division and their community partners are committed to making our schools and communities safe.

Schools will respond to student behaviours that may pose a potential risk for violence to students, staff and members of the community. The goal in supporting intervention measures is to strive to prevent and reduce school violence and to promote the safety of all members of our community.

This protocol supports collaborative planning among community partners to reduce violence and reflects safe, caring and restorative approaches. It fosters timely sharing of information about students who pose a risk for violence towards themselves or others. The protocol promotes the development of supportive and preventive plans.

The strength of this school division, post-secondary and community partnership lies in the multidisciplinary composition of the **Community Threat Assessment Team** (CTAT). The CTAT members will strive to:

- Share and review relevant student information
- Share the details of the threatening situation or evidence promptly
- Collaborate effectively
- Make use of a broad range of expertise

This collaborative process will respect the individual's rights to privacy and the safety of all, to the fullest extent possible.

This protocol may be accessed at: [www.nesd.ca](http://www.nesd.ca)

## Community Partners

The Schools are the lead team members in the *Community Threat Assessment and Support Protocol*. Community partners include the following agencies and organizations:

**Government of Saskatchewan:**

Ministry of Justice, Corrections and Policing  
Ministry of Social Services, Child and Family Services

**Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Detachments:**

Nipawin, Melfort, Tisdale, Carrot River and Hudson Bay

**Saskatchewan Health Authority**

Mental Health and Addiction Services

**Cumberland Regional College**

Nipawin, Melfort and Tisdale Campuses

Additional community partners may be invited to join as training occurs. This will allow the protocol to expand and reflect a comprehensive community commitment to early intervention measures and responses to behaviour that pose a potential threat to students, staff, and members of our com

## Documentation

***The Threat Assessment Report Form*** is completed within CLEVR by the school principal and serves as the official written record of the school/community meeting called to discuss student behaviour and to determine follow up plans or interventions. The written report and/or information from the meeting may be shared with others at the discretion of the Superintendent responsible for VTRA when it is deemed to be in the best interests of the student or others. All VTRA documentation is housed in CLEVR. However, there may be additional documentation from community agencies that must be securely stored as per legislative requirements.

If the plan requires further action outside of the school, the appropriate organization may receive a copy of the original report. In such instances, it is essential that all organizations make reasonable efforts to ensure that their protocols for the sharing, storage and retention of this information and this report are consistent with the following principles:

- At the minimum, partner organizations should ensure their personnel follow all requirements of any privacy legislation which may pertain to their agency;
- Information written and reported must be kept confidential and is intended to be shared with others on a "need to know" basis only;
- Information is shared only for the purpose for which it was created; and
- The written report is stored securely and retained only for the length of time required for the purpose for which it was created.

Organizations must ensure that policies and/or procedures are in place to protect the confidentiality of all information received by the organization and its employees through the assessment process. Organizations should take steps to ensure that all employees involved in the assessment process have a clear understanding of the requirements for confidentiality and of the consequences for breaches of confidentiality. There should be appropriate enforcement by the organization of their policies and procedures regarding confidentiality.

Requests to amend information or requests for access to information made by parents, students, or third parties will be addressed in accordance with the legislation applying to the agency to which the request is made.

## Definitions

### **Community Threat Assessment Categorizations**

- Low level of concern:
  - Risk to the target(s), students, staff and school safety appears minimal.
- Medium level of concern:
  - The threat could be carried out, although it may not appear realistic. Violent action is possible.
- High level of concern:
  - The threat or situation of concern appears to pose an imminent and serious danger to the safety of others.

### **High risk behaviours**

High risk behaviours express intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. High risk behaviours include but are not limited to: possession of weapon/replica, bomb threat plan, verbal/written or Internet threats to kill/injure self or others, fire setting, threatening violence and hate motivated violence.

**Note:** Do not be deceived when traditional risk behaviours do not exist. There is no profile or checklist for the high risk student. Some students who actually pose a threat display very few traits of the traditional high risk student. Identify when homicidal and suicidal domains exist together. This is critical to the development of a response to the incident, including the creation of a student support plan.

### **Immediate Threat**

In the case of immediate threat, staff will **CALL 911** and take the appropriate emergency response measures. The principal will contact the Superintendent with responsibility for VTRA who will contact the Director of Education.

### **Risk Assessment**

A risk assessment is typically a lengthier process that involves a number of standardized tests and measures that go beyond the scope of the school-based multidisciplinary Threat Assessment Team (TAT) assessment. After the "initial level of risk" is assessed and "immediate risk reducing intervention" has occurred, a further risk assessment may be required. Therefore, risk assessment is the process of determining if a student of concern may pose a further risk to some known or unknown target(s) at some unknown period in time. The student may be evidencing increasing violent ideation or behaviours that suggest that the frequency or intensity of his/her violence or violence potential may be escalating. Unlike the immediate intervention, the risk assessment is meant to be a more comprehensive evaluation of all risk reducing and risk enhancing factors affecting the student's functioning and to use that data to guide longer term intervention and treatment goals.

### **Threat**

A threat is any expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. Threats may be spoken, written, drawn, symbolic, posted on the internet (MSN, Facebook, etc.) or made by gesture only. Threats may be direct, indirect, conditional or veiled.

### **Threat Assessment**

Threat assessment is the process of determining if a threat maker (someone who utters, writes, emails, etc., a threat to kill a target or targets) actually poses a risk to the target(s) being threatened. Although many students, and others, engage in threat-making behaviour, research indicates that few actually pose a risk to harm the target being threatened. Multidisciplinary Threat Assessment Teams (TATs) engage in a data collection process, through semi-structured interviews, to determine "initial levels of risk" that may be posed and plan necessary risk-reducing interventions. Although a student of concern may be assessed as low risk, there may be data that indicates a more comprehensive risk assessment is required.

### **Worrisome Behaviour**

Worrisome behaviour is defined as those behaviours that cause concern and may indicate that a student is moving toward a greater risk of violent behaviour. (The majority of behaviours from pre-kindergarten to grade 12 fall into this category.) Worrisome behaviours include but are not limited to violent content in drawings and stories/journals, making vague threatening statements, unusual interest in fire, significant change in anti-social behaviour and significant change in baseline behaviour. Worrisome behaviours may be an early warning sign of the development of more serious high risk behaviours. All worrisome behaviours should be addressed in a timely manner. These situations may involve activation of the School TAT and consultation with division staff.

### **Violence**

Violence is a continuing process of thoughts and behaviours that is dependent on the interaction between **a person** who is inclined to violence; **a stimulus** that causes the violence; and **a setting** that allows for violence or does nothing to prevent a violent act from occurring. Violence is dynamic and multidimensional. It is a process that is developed over time.