

MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT

Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines®

To be completed by HPSD Counselling Consultant or Psychologist

A mental health assessment is usually conducted in cases involving a very serious substantive threat. The purpose of the mental health assessment is to maintain the safety and well-being of the student and others. Therefore, the assessment has two objectives:

1. *Treatment and referral needs.* Assess the student's present mental state and determine whether there are urgent mental health needs that require attention, such as risk of suicide, psychosis, or rage. Beyond these immediate needs, consider whether there are other treatment, referral, or support needs.
2. *Threat reduction.* Gather information on the student's motives and intentions in making the threat in order to understand why the threat was made and identify relevant strategies or interventions that have the potential to reduce the risk of violence.

Subject Interview (Person who made threat or engaged in threatening behavior)

Subject Name		See records and additional information obtained by threat assessment team to supplement this assessment.
Person(s) Conducting Interview		Location, Date of Interview

Usually the interview can begin by asking "Do you know why I want to talk to you?" and after the subject has responded, "Let me explain the purpose of our meeting today." Use these questions as a guide to interview the person making the threat. Ask other questions as appropriate. Try to use open-ended questions rather than leading questions. Adjust spacing below as needed.

Review of threat

1. What happened that made others worried that you wanted to harm someone? What exactly did you say or do that made them worried? What did you mean by that?

2. I know you must have had reasons to say (or do) that; can you explain what led up to it?

3. How would you do it? (carry out the threat) (Probe for details of any planning or preparation.) Where did the idea come from?

4. What could happen that would make you want to do it? (carry out the threat)

5. What would happen if you did do it? (review both effects on intended victims and consequences for student)

6. What do you think the school should do in a situation in which a person makes a threat like this?

7. What were you feeling then? How do you feel now?

8. How do you think (the person threatened) felt?

Relationship with intended victim(s)

1. How long have you known this person?

2. What has happened in the past between you and this person?

3. What do you think this person deserves?

4. Do you see any way that things could be improved between you and this person?

Family support

1. Whom do you live with? Are there family members you don't live with? Have there been any changes in the past year?

2. Whom in your home are you close to?

3. How well do your parents/guardians know you?

4. Where do you go after school? Where are your parents/guardians at this time? How much do they keep track of where you are or what you are doing?

5. How strict are your parents/guardians? What do they do if you do something they don't want you to do? When was the last time you got in trouble with them? What was the worst time?

6. How will your parents/guardians react (or how did they react) when they found out about this situation?

Stress and trauma

1. What kinds of things have been going on with you lately? What sorts of things have you worried about?

2. How has your school work been going lately? Are there things you have been worried about with your school work? Other things at school?

3. What is the worst thing that has happened to you lately? Have any other bad things happened? Is there something you regret or wish you could change?

4. Have there been any changes in your family? Has anyone been sick, moved away, or had anything bad happen to them?

5. Do you have any family members in jail or prison?

6. Do you take any medication?

7. Have you been involved in any counseling?

Mood

1. What has your mood been like the past few weeks? Have you felt down or depressed at times? How bad has it been? (Be alert for statements of pessimism and hopelessness that might indicate suicide risk. If there are indications of suicidal thoughts or feelings, there should be a more extensive evaluation of suicide risk. If necessary, develop a plan for protecting the student and making appropriate referrals.)

2. Have you felt nervous or anxious? Irritable or short-tempered? How bad has it been?

3. Have you ever felt like life wasn't worth living? Like maybe you would kill yourself?

4. Have you ever done something to hurt yourself on purpose? Ever cut yourself on purpose?

5. Have you had any problems with your sleep? Appetite? Energy level? Concentration?

6. Have you been taking any medication to help with your mood or for any other reason?

Psychotic symptoms

Ask a few probe questions and follow up if there is any indication of delusions or hallucinations. Phrase questions appropriate to student's age and understanding.

1. Have you had any unusual experiences lately, such as hearing things that others cannot hear or seeing things that others cannot see?

2. Have you felt like someone was out to get you or wanted to harm you? Have you had any other fears that seem strange or out of the ordinary?

3. Do you have any abilities or powers that others do not have, such as ESP or reading minds?

4. Have you felt numb or disconnected from the world, or like you were somehow outside your body?

Note and inquire about any other symptoms of mental disorder.

Weapons

Ask about any weapons mentioned in the threat. As an example, these questions concern a threat made to stab someone.

1. You said that you were going to stab (name of victim). What were you going to stab him with?

2. Do you have a knife? What kind of a knife is it? (Or, how would you get a knife?)

3. Have you ever had to use a knife with someone? What happened?

4. What do you think would happen if you did use a knife with (name of victim)?

Access to firearms

Ask about firearms in all cases, even if no firearm was mentioned. If the threat involved a knife, bomb, or other weapon, ask about that weapon, too.

1. Do you have a gun?

2. Are there guns in your home? Have you ever used a gun for hunting or target shooting?

3. If you wanted a gun, how would you get one?

4. What do you think you might do if you had a gun?

5. Have you ever had to use a gun with someone? Have you ever thought about using a gun with someone?

Aggressive behavior

1. Do people treat you fairly? Who has been unfair with you lately? When people treat you unfairly, what do you do about it?

2. When you get angry, what do you do? Has your temper ever gotten you into trouble?

3. Do you get into fights? When was the last time? What happened?

4. Have you ever threatened to harm anyone before?

5. Have you thought about what it would be like to hurt someone really bad? Have you written any stories or made any drawings that are violent?

6. Have you ever set fire to things?

7. Have you damaged your own property or someone else's property?

8. Have you ever intentionally hurt an animal?

School discipline

1. When was the last time you got into trouble in school? What happened?

2. Have you ever been suspended or expelled?

3. Have your parents ever been called to school because of your behavior?

4. Do you ever cut school or certain classes?

5. Do you feel that the rules at this school are fair? What has been unfair?

Delinquent behavior

1. Have you been in trouble with the law or with police before? What happened?

2. Have you ever gone to juvenile court? What was it about?

3. Have you done things that could have gotten you arrested or in trouble with the law? What was the worst thing? What else?

4. Do you drink beer, wine, or other alcohol? Have you ever? How often do you drink? When was the last time? Tell me about it.

5. Do you smoke marijuana? Have you ever? How often? When was the last time?

6. Have you used any other drugs? How often? When was the last time? Tell me about it.

Exposure to violence

1. Do you see or hear of violence in your neighborhood?

2. Do you know anyone who was shot, stabbed, or beat up real bad?

3. Do people argue much at home? Does anyone get physically aggressive?

4. What kind of movies do like? What kind of video games do you enjoy playing? What are your favorite Internet sites?

5. Ask the student about his/her reactions to any recent acts of violence or to any highly publicized school shootings.

Bullying

Bullying is broadly defined and may include teasing, social exclusion, or other forms of humiliation in addition to physical threats of violence. The student may not use the term "bully," and may be reluctant to admit being the victim of bullying behavior, so be prepared to rephrase questions and probe for victim experiences.

1. Is there anyone who has threatened you recently? Is there anyone who makes you feel afraid? (Ask about sexual threats if appropriate to situation.)

2. Is there anyone who has teased you or picked on you recently? Is there anyone who has beat you up or pushed you around? How about at home?

In response to any positive answer, follow up for more information: How often does it happen? What have you tried to do about it? Did you let any adult know about this, and if so, what happened? Be alert to statements indicating that a bullied student feels like there is no solution to the problem or is contemplating revenge.

Peer relations

1. What are your friends like? Have you had any trouble with your friends lately? Who is your best friend?

2. How would your friends describe you?

3. Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend? (Keep in mind that the student might not be heterosexual, and there may be concerns in this area.) How are things going with him/her? Did you have one before? What happened in that relationship?

4. Do you have friends who get in trouble?

5. Have you ever joined a gang? Been part of a group like a crew, clique, posse, or mob?

6. Do any of your friends know about (refer to threat situation?) What did they say about it? Anyone who feels the same way you do?

Coping

1. How do you like to spend your free time?

2. What kinds of things do you do well?

3. What are your hobbies and interests? What do you enjoy doing?

4. Can you think of a problem you faced in the past that worked out okay? Can you think of a problem that you solved? Can you think of a time when you went to someone about a problem and that person was able to solve it?

5. What are your plans for the future? What would you like to do when you finish school?

6. What could we do that would help with (refer to the problem that led to the threat)?

Parent/Guardian Interview

Parent Name		Relationship to Student	
Person(s) Conducting Interview		Location, Date of Interview	

Understandably, parents may feel apprehensive, guilty, or defensive when being interviewed about their child's behavior. It is important that the interviewer find ways to convey respect for the parent, starting from the initial contact and throughout the interview. Also, it should be evident that the interviewer is interested in understanding and helping the parent's child; otherwise, the parent may regard the interview as an investigation designed to uncover evidence of wrongdoing by the student or incompetence by the parent. Overall, the interviewer should make every effort to engage the parent as an ally. Emphasize the common goal of helping their child to be safe and successful in school.

Parent knowledge of the threat

1. What do you (the parent) know about the threat?

2. Have you heard your child (or use child's name) talk about things like this before?

3. Are you familiar with (the intended victim)? (Ask about the child's history with the intended victim—previous relationship and interactions.)

4. (Ask questions to determine if the child has the means to carry out the threat, such as access to firearms.)

5. What are you planning to do about the threat? (Is the parent willing to work with the school to develop a plan to assure the threat will not be carried out and that the student's needs are addressed?)

School adjustment

1. Has your child ever been suspended or expelled from school?

2. Have you ever met with the school (teacher, counselor, principal) about concerns in the past? What happened, what was going on, what was the outcome?

3. Has your child ever needed special help in school? Ever been retained?

4. Has your child ever been tested in school?

5. How does your child like school?

6. How often does your child do homework?

7. What are your child's teachers like?

Family relationships and current stressors

1. Who lives in the home?

2. Are there any important events that have affected your family/child? Ask about any recent or pending changes, such as:

Move, divorce/separation, losses

Financial status, employment changes for parents

Others in home involved with court or the law

3. Who does your child share concerns with? Who is he/she close to?

4. How well does he/she get along with parents? Siblings? Type of conflicts, over what, how resolved?

5. How does your child show anger toward you and other family members?

6. What does your child do after school? Who supervises? What time is your child supposed to be home at night?

7. What responsibilities does your child have at home?

8. Does your child follow rules? What are the consequences for not following the rules?

Peer relations and bullying

1. Has your child reported being teased, intimidated, rejected, or bullied in some other way? (If so, what has the parent done in response?)

2. Who are your child's friends? Are you pleased or displeased with your child's choice of friends?

3. How much is the child influenced by peers? Are there any examples of your child doing something to please peers that got him or her into trouble?

Delinquent behavior

1. Has your child been in trouble with the law or with police before? What happened?

2. Has your child ever gone to juvenile court? What was it about?

3. Has your child done things that could have gotten him or her arrested or in trouble with the law? What was the worst thing? What else?

4. Does your child drink beer, wine, or other alcohol?

5. Does your child smoke marijuana?

6. Has your child used any other drugs?

History of aggression

1. How does your child handle frustration?

2. When your child gets angry, what does he/she do?

3. Has your child gotten into fights in the past? When, where, with whom?

4. Has your child's temper ever gotten him/her into trouble?

5. Has your child ever hit you or other family members?

6. Has your child destroyed his or her own things, or someone else's property?

7. Does your child have any pets? Has he/she ever intentionally hurt the pet or some other animal?

Access to weapons

1. Do you have a gun in your home? Does your child have access to firearms through friends, relatives, or some other source?

2. Does your child have access to weapons other than firearms, such as military knives, martial arts weapons or some other kind of weapon?

3. Has your child ever talked about using a weapon to hurt someone? Ever gotten into trouble for using a weapon, carrying a weapon, or threatening someone with a weapon?

4. What can you do to restrict your child's access to weapons?

Exposure to violence

1. Has your child ever been a victim of abuse?

2. Is your child exposed to violence in the neighborhood?

3. Do people argue much at home? Has there been any physical aggression at home?

4. What kinds of movies, video games, internet sites does your child like? Any parent restrictions? Level of supervision? Child's response?

History

1. Ask about any delays in cognitive, motor, language development. How old was your child when he/she started to walk, talk?

2. Has your child ever had a problem with bedwetting? When, how long? Was anything done for this?

3. Has your child ever been hospitalized? Had any serious illnesses?

4. Has your child had any recent medical treatment? Taking any medications? Obtain diagnoses and medications. Ask for a release.

Mental health

1. Does your child have problems paying attention? Does your child follow directions without repetition and reminders? Does your child complete activities on his/her own? Does your child say things without thinking? Surprised by the consequences of his/her actions?

2. What has your child's mood been like the past few weeks?

3. Has your child been unusually nervous or anxious? Irritable or short-tempered? How bad has it been?

4. Has your child had problems with sleep? Appetite? Energy level? Concentration?

5. Has your child ever talked about hurting himself or herself? Have you ever been concerned that he/she might be suicidal?

6. Have there been any times when your child seemed to be hearing things that weren't there? Has he/she said things that didn't make sense or seemed to believe in things that weren't real?

7. Has your child ever seen a counselor or therapist? Ever taken medication for his/her behavior or mood?

8. Has your child had any involvement with other agencies/programs in the community?

Teacher/Staff Interview

Name of Person Interviewed		Relationship to Student	
Person(s) Conducting Interview		Location, Date of Interview	

Academics

1. How is this student doing academically? Has there been any change in recent weeks?

2. What are this student's verbal skills? How well can he or she express himself/herself in words?

3. Has this student been considered for special education or placed in special education? What kinds of difficulties does the student have? If a student is receiving special education services, ask about the problem behaviors that are regarded as part of his or her disability.

Teacher knowledge of the threat

1. What do you know about the threat?

2. Have you heard this student talk about things like this before?

3. What have other students told you about this incident?

4. Is there another teacher or staff member who might know something about this?

Student's peer relations

1. How well does this student get along with other students?

2. Who are the student's friends?

3. Are there students who do not get along with this student?

4. Have there been other conflicts or difficulties with peers?

5. Has this student ever complained of being bullied, teased, or treated unfairly by others?

Depression

1. Have there been any apparent changes in the student's mood, demeanor, or activity level? Seemed withdrawn or apathetic?

2. Has the student expressed any attitudes that could imply depression, such as expressions of hopelessness or futility, inadequacy or shame, self-criticism or worthlessness?

3. Has this student shown an increase in irritability or seemed short-tempered?

Discipline

1. What kinds of discipline problems have you experienced with this student?

2. How does this student respond to being corrected by an adult?

3. What are the student's emotional responses to being disciplined?

Aggression

1. How does this student express anger?

2. Does this student seem to hold a grudge? Seem resentful?

3. Has this student done anything that expresses anger or aggression, or has an aggressive theme in written assignments, drawings, class projects, etc.?

Parents

1. Have you had any contact with this student's parents? What happened?