



Companion to Level 1 Protocol (Explanation of Item Questions.)

The following is a reference of explanations for the questions listed in **Step 3** of the **Level 1 Protocol**. It is intended to clarify the intentions of each question and to assist site-based Level 1 teams to approach the protocol with greater confidence. The Level 1 team should keep a situational perspective when examining the student(s) and the factors noted below.

Level 1 Protocol, Step 3, Question Numbers:

1. Define threats or dangerous situation using the following continuum

This question asks for a clarification of the threat. Place the threat on the continuum illustrated within the questions and define your concerns. Note that there is a change within the continuum from aggression (non-serious or non-lethal injury) to violent aggression (serious or lethal injury).

2. Have there been any communications suggesting a potential attack or act of aggression? (Direct threats, specific references, veiled threats or vague warnings)

This question addresses the type of communication indicating a threat. Threats are sometimes made directly in verbal communication, art, email, internet use, written language exercises, and any other medium of communication. They can also be made by indirect, veiled, or casual references to possible harmful events, ominous warnings, or references to previously occurring violent events such as school shootings. A threat does not have to be specifically stated to be of concern, nor does it have to be stated or implied within the school setting.

3. Are there indications of a plan, feasible process or clear intentions to harm others?

This question addresses attack-related behavior. Threatening language is just language without related behavior or intent. Many threats are not stated with language but are indicated by attack related behavior. Attack related behavior may be, but is not limited to the following:

- A plan (complex or simple) to carry out a targeted act of violence or aggression against a specific individual, group, or student body. Such a plan would have a sequence of actions necessary for its success and almost always requires a motive. The more plausible and detailed a plan, the greater the risk.
- The acquisition of a weapon, the attempted acquisition of a weapon or research about how to acquire a weapon. (if the threat is the use of physical force to the point of serious or lethal injury, then the physical force is the weapon.)
- The rehearsal of the event or a similar event. Rehearsal is like simulation or practice. Rehearsal or simulation is often necessary before a targeted event can be completely planned and carried out. Rehearsal can be indicated through art, fantasy games, writing or film projects, the use of movies or Internet sites that have themes and sequences of violence that allow the simulation of targeted and violent acts or through the first-person shooter video games that also allow for simulation of sequential and violent acts (example of such games are Call of Duty, Crisis, Team Fortress, Counterstrike.) However, the use of such games or movies as entertainment does not lead students to act out violently. Their use is only attack-related behavior when it becomes rehearsal or simulation and practice.
- Scheduling an attack. Scheduling the act is sometime indicated through communication or actually noted in clear detail. Sometimes the schedule is flexible, awaiting a triggering event (teasing, rejections, loss) that further justifies the violence and locks it in as the only solution.

4. Are there indications of suicidal ideation, intent, or planning?

This question examines the presence of history of suicidal ideas, gestures, references, and intent. The wish to die, be killed, or commit suicide combined with a threat to harm others increases risk, especially if the self-destructive behavior is the last part of a plan to harm others and carry out revenge or justice.

5. Are there indications of a specific target(s)?

This question examines the focus of the aggression or violent ideation or behavior. Is there an ongoing consideration or focus on a particular person, group or student body? If the situation is absent a notable target, it is likely a situation that revolves around reactive aggression, used as a means to bully, intimidate, confront or defend interests and wants.

6. Are there indications of a weapons choice and availability?

This question examines the obvious; however, it is important to remember that even if weapons are not available within the home, they are usually available within the community.

7. Are there indications of an unusual or inappropriate interest in acts of violence, previous school attacks or attackers, weaponry or anti-social characters, notorious criminals, murderers, or gangs (historical or fictional)?

This question is somewhat complicated. What may be inappropriate to some may still be within the normal scope of age, cultural or developmental range for others. The question is similar to #3 as it examines whether the interest is a curiosity, a fascination or if the interest is a sort of admiration for the anti-social character as role-model and example of how to justify violence as problem solving.

8. Are there indications of a motive or goal for aggressive behavior or a lethal attack?

This question pairs with #5. If there is a focus on a specific target or targets, then there is very likely a motive. While there can certainly be many motives for acting out violently or aggressively, the most common seem to be revenge or vendetta, lost love, humiliation and the desire to prove bravery after making a threat or taking a dare. If the situation is absent a motive, then it may be a situation that revolves around reactive aggression or the affectation of rage. Reactive aggressive and violent talk often has triggers that agitate the situation rapidly. Such triggers are usually not motives but should still be identified in order to avoid or eliminate them in the future.

9. Are there indications of hopeless, stressed, overwhelming, victimized or desperate situations (real or perceived)?

This question examines the obvious. As students lose hope of resolving stressful or overwhelming situations through acceptable social or coping skills, they are more likely to engage desperate solutions and last-ditch efforts to take control. It is important to note that the point of this question is to examine the perception of the person or party you are concerned with, not necessarily what is realistically observed or known by others (staff, parents, other students or the community).

10. Are there indications of capacity or ability to carry out an act of targeted / planned violence?

This question examines the feasibility or possibility of a planned and carried out threat, based upon the organizational, cognitive or adaptive capacity of the person or party of concern. If someone is making fairly exaggerated or complex threats but is unable to organize due to supervision, cognitive ability or overall functioning, then the feasibility drops.

11. Are beliefs or ideas: Irrational (paranoid, obsessive, a feature of a disability, or unreciprocated romantic obsession)?

Are values, beliefs or ideas socially maladjusted (sees violence as justifiable method of problem solving and accepts consequences)?

This question examines the ideas and beliefs within the threat to determine if they can be linked to attack-related behavior (see question #3), targeted behavior (see question #5) or motive (see question #8). Unreciprocated romantic obsession and social maladjustment tend to be less obvious or easily observed and thus more difficult to connect to motive and target. Nevertheless, both features are frequently connected to situations that pose risk to others. Paranoia, obsessive or compulsive behavior or disability related behavior, such as threatening talk as a feature of Autism or Tourette's Syndrome, is often grandiose or implausible. Threats that are features of such behavior have easily observable indicators and easily examinable motives that are either superficial or transient; therefore, attack-related behavior, if it exists, is more quickly determined. Typically, threats that are made and are features of disabilities are less concerning than those that are made or implied with thoughtful and sober consideration.

12. Are actions and behaviors consistent with any threatening communications?

This question examines the relationship between communicated threats or implications of threat and the behavior that accompanies the communication. If threats are made but there are no attack-related behaviors, motives, or a specific target(s), consistent with that threat, then risk decreases. Many threats that lack attack-related behavior are likely to be a means of communicating dissatisfaction, attention seeking, expressing anger, releasing stress or even an affectation of strength or power (bravado).

13. Are caregivers, peers, and/or staff concerned about potential for violence or aggression?

This question examines the concerns and opinions of others regarding the person or party of concern and the concerning situation that exists. Concerns may range from an odd discomfort to a complete list of reasons why caution should be taken. If violence is being considered or planned, it is difficult to hide the indicators. In fact, sometimes little care is actually taken to hide the intentions and, while there may be little to no documentation of past behavioral issues, there may likely be several people who have been or are currently concerned.

14. Are there trusting, successful relationships with one or more responsible adults?

This question examines the depth of relationships with pro-social adults. The greater and healthier the connection with teachers, coaches, parents, administrators, church leaders, etc, the less chance there is of wanting to disappoint or hurt them. The situation that lacks any connection to adults is the one of greater risk, as there is little to lose by acting out. This is one of the most important questions and indicators of need on the Level 1 protocol. If a student or group of students lack connection to pro-social adults and are also marginalized within the student population, then intervention and connection is strongly indicated!

15. What are aggravating factors - circumstances, events, or triggers increase or agitate the likelihood of a violent or aggressive attack?

This question examines the obvious. If you can identify the situations that agitate or trigger violent thinking, threatening or behavior, you can intervene and decrease the chance of a violent or aggressive incident.

16. What circumstances, events, or inhibitors decrease the likelihood of a violent or aggressive attack?

This question is similar to #15 but examines the opposite. Identify and increase actions, events, interests, relationships, goals, activities, memberships, etc. that promotes responsible and accountable pro-social behavior and you can decrease the chance of a violent or aggressive incident. The situation that lacks any inhibitors is one of greater risk, as there is little to lose by acting out and little to motivate healthy solutions.

17. Are there indications that peer group reinforces delinquent thinking? What are relationship dynamics (leader, follower, victim, outcast, marginalized, disconnected, etc.)?

This question examines peer relationships, marginalization, and accepted delinquent thinking that may support using violence as a solution. Risk increases if a situation lacks positive social connection, accountability and inhibitors but is filled with anti-social thinking about entitlement, revenge and the use of violence as an acceptable means of solving problems.

18. Is there a history of school, behavioral, drug/alcohol or developmental issues?

This question examines issues that are related to vulnerability and coping skills but are not necessarily directly related to targeted or planned violence. Risk increases considerably when coping skills are weak and emotional resiliency is low.

19. Are there mental health issues?

This question is similar to question #18 in that it examines an issue that may indicate a poor reserve of coping strategies and a lack of emotional resiliency.

Developed by John Van Dreal at Salem-Keizer Public Schools using the following information: Pynchon and Borum, Assessing Threats of Targeted Group Violence: Contributions from Social Psychology; Reddy, Borum, Berlun, Vossekui, Fein, and Modzeleski, Evaluating Risk for Targeted Violence in Schools: Comparing Risk Assessment, Threat Assessment, and Other Approaches; O'Toole, The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective; Fein, Vossekui and Holden, Threat Assessment: An Approach to Prevent Targeted Violence; Meloy, Violence Risk and Threat Assessment, Specialized Training Services Publication; De Becker, The Gift of Fear; Johnson, Assessment of Violent and Potentially Violent Youth In the Schools. Calhoun, Hunters and Howlers. Vossekui, Pollack, Bourne, Modzieski, Reddy, and Fein, **Threat Assessment in Schools, A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates.**

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All above reference material can be linked from our web page:

<http://www.studentthreatassessment.org>

20. Other Concerns:

List any other concerns. Remember that this is not a quantifiable questionnaire or a fixed checklist. It is intended as a set of important questions to ask and lead to other questions or concerns as they are suggested within the process or examination.

Place a copy of this protocol in envelope marked "Confidential" and place in student's file.