

Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG)

How should I notify the school of a threat?

If you feel a threat has been made, contact your school administrator or school counselor immediately.

What is the purpose of CSTAG?

The process of CSTAG is used to conduct a threat assessment, as explained in the manual, *Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines: Intervention and Support to Prevent Violence*¹, or other training resources.

Do I conduct a threat assessment for all threats?

No. It is not feasible or necessary to conduct a formal assessment for clearly insignificant behavior such as playful bantering or joking. Conduct a threat assessment if there is some reason to be concerned about the behavior. When in doubt about a threat, conduct a threat assessment.

Do I follow the CSTAG process for every threat assessment case?

No. Transient cases are documented with only a few pages (Threat Report, Interview(s), Key Observations, Threat Response), whereas only very serious substantive threats are likely to use all of the forms. In large samples, approximately 75% of cases are transient and fewer than 10% are very serious substantive threats.

Who completes the process?

Threat assessment is a team process and can be documented by any member of the team. A transient threat might be handled by just one team member (preferably in consultation with at least one other team member), whereas a substantive threat will likely engage several team members.

If a threat is resolved, do I change the threat classification to “no threat”?

No. The threat classification reflects your initial assessment and guides your next steps, regardless of how the threat is resolved. Occasionally, the threat classification might change if you find, for example, that a transient case is more serious than you thought and should be changed to a substantive threat. The resolution of a threat should be included in the CSTAG documentation.

Should I document transient threats?

Yes. If a student later carries out a threat that was previously judged to be transient, you will want documentation to show that you made a defensible effort to assess the threat. If a student makes multiple threats, documentation will provide a useful perspective.

¹ The manual is available from School Threat Assessment Consultants LLC at <https://www.schoolta.com/manual>

THREAT ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE PROTOCOL®

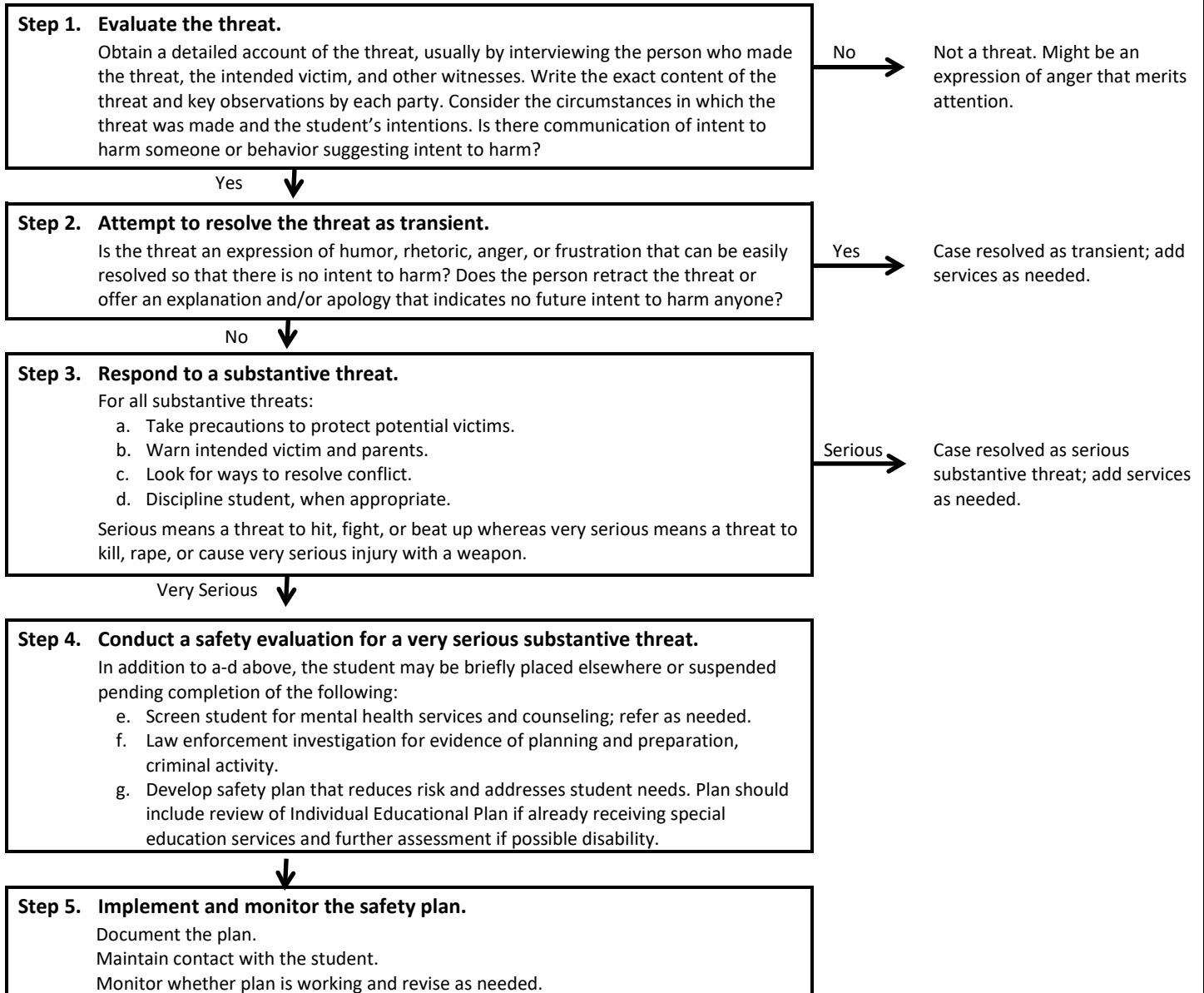
Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

OVERVIEW

A threat is a communication of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, written, gestured, or expressed in some other form, such as via text messaging, email, or other digital means. An expression of intent to harm someone is considered a threat regardless of whether it is communicated to the intended target(s) and regardless of whether the intended target is aware of the threat. Threats may be implied by behavior that an observer would reasonably regard as threatening, planning, or preparing to commit a violent act. When in doubt, treat the communication or behavior as a threat and conduct a threat assessment. Threats that are not easily recognized as harmless (e.g., an obvious joke that worries no one) should be reported to the school administrator or other team members. The administrator or another team member makes a preliminary determination of the seriousness of the threat. The student, targets of the threat, and other witnesses should be interviewed to obtain information using this protocol. A *transient* threat means there is no sustained intent to harm and a *substantive* threat means the intent is present (or not clear) and therefore requires protective action. This form is a guide for conducting a threat assessment, but each case may have unique features that require some modification.

A threat assessment is not a crisis response. If there is indication that violence is imminent (e.g., person has a firearm at school or is on the way to school to attack someone), a crisis response is appropriate. Take immediate action such as calling 911 and follow the school crisis response plan.

School Threat Assessment Decision Tree*



*This 5-step decision tree is a revision of the original 7-step decision tree for the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines that retains the same information and procedures in a more condensed format.