

# THREAT ASSESSMENT

A threat assessment is an approach to violence prevention. It is a way to analyze a wide range of situations. It is conducted when a person(s) threatens to commit a violent act or engages in behavior that appears to threaten an act of violence. The process involves evaluating the threat and the circumstances surrounding it in order to uncover any evidence that indicates the threat is likely to be carried out.

SCSD staff are trained in the Virginia School Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG), an evidence-based model.

**What is a threat?** A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone. Threats can be spoken, written, posted on social media, made through a phone call or expressed in other ways. They can be direct, indirect or implied. When in doubt about whether a behavior is a threat, we evaluate it as a threat.

There are a number of steps that take place when conducting a threat assessment. It is necessary to form the threat assessment team, consider the context, investigate, determine the facts, gather information from multiple sources and more. Through the assessment, it will be determined whether there is intention to carry out the threat or not.

**Why do we need threat assessment?** Schools need a safe, rational approach to evaluating students and others who demonstrate potentially dangerous behavior. Media attention to high profile incidents resulted with the public becoming sensitized and misperceptions about the likelihood of violence in schools. The fear of school shootings drew an extreme reaction and resulted in an expansion of zero tolerance policies. Under zero tolerance, students could be automatically suspended even if the violation was accidental or posed no serious threat to others. As such, children would be suspended from school for bringing to school a tiny plastic gun or pointing a finger like a gun.

A threat assessment allows for a more flexible and less punitive response. When a student's threat does not indicate a substantive intent to harm anyone, the incident can be resolved without significant disruption of the student's education. **Threat Assessment is part of a comprehensive approach.**

