

## ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE NO. 315

### THREAT ASSESSMENT PROTOCOL

The Board is committed to creating and maintaining a Christ-centered environment in schools where students, staff, parents, and others feel safe. To this end, the Board shall establish a protocol for responding to student threats/high risk behaviors.

#### Definitions

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.

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

#### **The Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG):**

##### **DEFINITION:**

CSTAG is an evidence-based model for schools to use in conducting threat assessments in K-12 schools. CSTAG is an approach to violence prevention that emphasizes early attention to problems such as: bullying, teasing, and other forms of student conflict before they escalate into violent behavior. School staff members are encouraged to adopt a flexible, problem-solving approach, as distinguished from a more punitive, zero tolerance approach to student misbehavior. As a result of this training, the model is intended to generate broader changes in the nature of staff-student interactions around disciplinary matters and to encourage a more positive school climate in which students feel treated with fairness and respect.

The guidelines follow a five-step decision-tree. In brief, the first two steps are a triage process in which team members investigate a reported threat and determine whether the threat can be readily resolved as a **transient** threat that is not a serious threat. Examples of transient threats are jokes or statements made in anger that are expressions of feeling or figures of speech rather than expressions of a genuine intent to harm someone. Any threat that cannot be clearly identified and resolved as a transient is treated as a substantive threat.

**Substantive** threats always require protective action to prevent the threat from being carried out. The remaining three steps guide the team through a more extensive assessment and response based on the seriousness of the threat. In the most serious cases, the team conducts a safety evaluation that includes both a law enforcement investigation and a mental health assessment of the student. The culmination of the threat assessment is the development of a

safety plan that is designed to address the problem or conflict underlying the threat and prevent the act of violence from taking place.

For both transient and substantive threats, there is an emphasis on helping students to resolve conflicts and minimizing the use of zero-tolerance suspensions as a disciplinary response.

## **Procedures**

### **1. Reporting**

- a) Any person in a school having knowledge of a threat of harm (physically, psychologically, or spiritually) must inform the administration team or counsellor team in their school.
- b) No action shall be taken against a person who makes a report unless it is made maliciously or without reasonable grounds.
- c) In cases where a report is made maliciously, the person shall be dealt with according to school division practices and the law, where applicable.

### **2. Duty to Respond**

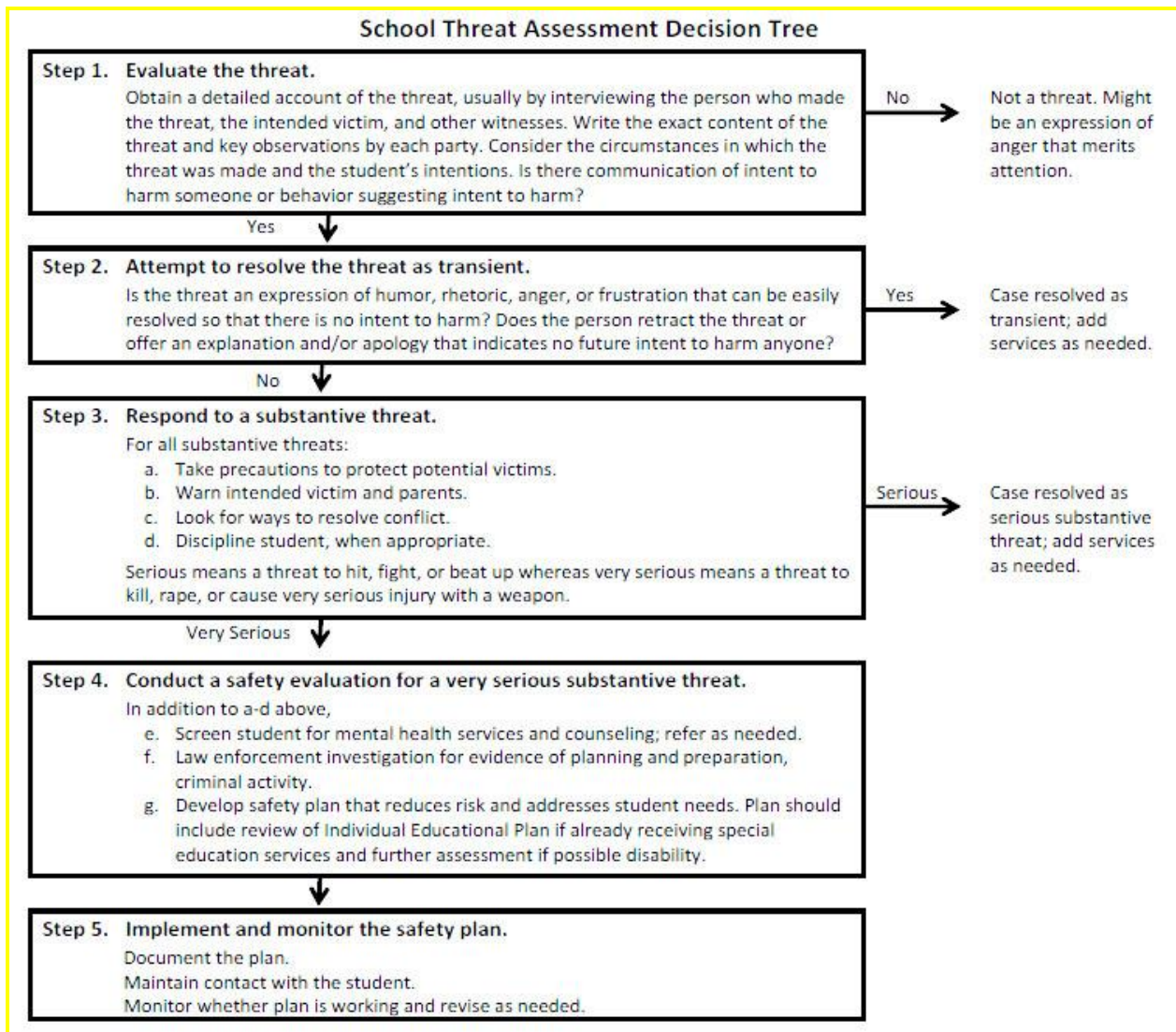
Schools shall respond to all transient and substantive threats; all threatening behaviors shall be taken seriously and assessed accordingly. Threat assessment must be initiated as soon as a threat has been received. If there is an indication that violence is imminent (e.g., a person who has a firearm 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.

- a. Each school shall designate a threat assessment team leader, who should be either a school administrator or school counselor.
- b. Interviews shall be conducted with students involved in the incident.

CSTAG Forms: [Forms](#)

Bullying Flowchart: [Bullying](#)

### 3. Process Decision Tree: Five steps to Threat Assessment:



### 4. Substantive Threat

- a) Upon identifying that the risk is substantive, the principal shall initiate the protocol for the response; principal, counselor, Division CSTAG personnel, and police in order to assess the threat.
- b) In cases where it is believed a Criminal Code violation has occurred, the police officer assigned to the team has the "first call " as to the course of action.
- c) The school principal shall notify the Associate Superintendent of Inclusive Learning as soon as possible following initial police contact.
- d) If the police choose not to lay initial charges, the school team shall continue to conduct a threat assessment and determine follow-up recommendations.

- e) The school principal shall notify the parent(s) of the student making the threat at the earliest opportunity, as well as the parents of those students against whom the threat was made. Parents become an integral part of the initial threat assessment process.
- f) In order to protect others and/or the threat maker, students may be suspended from school by the principal during the assessment period.

(A suspension may create the necessary context for the threat maker who is already struggling with suicidal or homicidal ideation (fluidity). When a suspension occurs, a key question beyond “when to suspend” is “where to suspend”. The isolation and disconnection felt by high risk students during a suspension may be exacerbated if steps are not taken to keep the student connected to healthy supports.)

- g) The school team will guide the process from initial assessment, to planning interventions to decrease risk, to plans for re-entry to school where a suspension has occurred.
- h) If circumstances warrant and following the completion of necessary assessments, team members may work with the student and their parent(s) to develop a re-entry plan for school that becomes a signed contract by all participants.

#### 5. Notifying Staff, students, and parents that a threat has been made:

- a) The CSTAG team shall ensure that appropriate support is provided to those against whom threats have been made as well as the threat maker as needed.
- b) The principal shall notify all school staff, and parents, if necessary, within a reasonable time period, when the protocol has been activated as a result of threats and or high risk behaviour.
- c) The principal has a duty to inform the parents of the intended target that a threat has been made. Under FOIP, the principal is able to release information regarding the nature of the threat but not the name of the threat maker.

#### 6. Students Requiring Special Consideration

- a) When dealing with students under twelve years of age, students with special needs, or other exceptional students, accountability/maturation issues and cognitive abilities shall be taken into consideration.
- b) Since these students can still pose a risk, the CSTAG team shall be consulted.

#### 7. Off-Grounds threats:

- a) A threat takes place at a school-sponsored event or while students are traveling to or from school, the incident shall be handled like any other incident that took place at school: apply the existing school discipline policy and conduct a threat assessment.

- b) If the threat occurs off school property and is not a school-related activity, the situation is more complex. If a threat has been reported to school personnel outside of school hours, notify RCMP immediately to assess the threat. At the earliest opportunity, it is still appropriate to conduct a school-based threat assessment for safety purposes.

8. CSTAG Threat Assessment Report:

- a) The CSTAG team leader shall be responsible for completing a CSTAG Threat Assessment Report, which shall be kept on file. A copy shall be forwarded to the Associate Superintendent of Inclusion. Report Form: [Report Form](#)
- b) The notification of a completed CSTAG Threat Assessment Report will be placed in the student's cumulative file.

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### APPENDIX 'A'

#### SERIES OF INTERVIEWS

The **first question** to be asked is an “overriding” one. “**How much time do we have?**” When threats are clear, detailed and denote a specific time that is imminent, (i.e. A student reports after lunch that his friend said at 2:15 p.m. today he is going to finally “bring a gun to school and blow away the freaks in math class”) action will need to be taken to ensure the safety of possible targets. In these situations police involvement is critical and lockdown procedures may need to be implemented. When the threat is not imminent, circumstance will help the team determine who and when to engage in the clinical interviewing process. In some instances the threat maker may be among the last people to be interviewed.

The **second question** to be asked is, “**Who will be interviewed?**” It is understood that those selected for initial interview often provide information that results in further interviews being conducted with more individuals. Teams need to decide whom the most credible and best-informed individuals and focus on them first.

The **third question** to be asked is, “**What order will we interview them in?**” If the threat is not imminent, the threat assessment team has the flexibility (based on circumstance) to decide what order to interview. For example, the threat maker may be one of the last individuals to be interviewed if initial data suggests the risk is low and the team wants to look at credible collateral information first (i.e. Talk with some of the threat makers’ teachers before interviewing the threat maker).

The **fourth question** to be asked is, “**Who will interview whom?**” The answer to this question will depend on circumstance and “*relationship*” between the team members and those to be interviewed. Some individuals may be interviewed one on one while the team may decide that two members should be present while interviewing others.

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### APPENDIX 'B'

#### Interview Guiding Questions

1. What are the student's motive(s) and goals?
  - What motivated the student to make the statements or take the actions that caused him or her to come to attention?
  - Does the situation or circumstance that led to these statements or actions still exist?
  - Does the student have a major grievance or grudge? Against whom?
  - What efforts have been made to resolve the problem and what has been the result? Does the potential attacker feel any part of the problem is resolved or see any alternative?
2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?
  - What, if anything, has the student communicated to someone else (targets, friends, other students, teachers, family, others) or written in a diary, journal or Web site concerning his/her ideas and/or intentions?
  - Have friends been alerted or "warned away"?
3. Has the student shown inappropriate interest in any of the following?
  - School attacks or attackers;
  - Weapons (including recent acquisition of any relevant weapon);
  - Incidents of mass violence (terrorism, workplace violence, mass murderers).
4. Has the student engaged in attack-related behaviours? These behaviours might include:
  - Developing an attack idea or plan;
  - Making efforts to acquire or practice with weapons;
  - Casing, or checking out, possible sites and areas for attack;
  - Rehearsing attacks or ambushes.
5. Does the student have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?
  - How organized is the student's thinking and behaviour?
  - Does the student have the means, e.g., access to a weapon to carry out an attack?
6. Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation and/or despair?
  - Is there information to suggest that the student is experiencing desperation and/or despair?
  - Has the student experienced a recent failure, loss and/or loss of status?
  - Is the student known to be having difficulty coping with a stressful event?
  - Is the student now, or has the student ever been, suicidal or "accident prone"? Has the student engaged in behaviour that suggests that he or she has considered ending their life?

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### APPENDIX 'B'

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7. Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?
  - Does the student have at least one relationship with an adult where the student feels that he or she can confide in the adult and believes that the adult will listen without judging or jumping to conclusions? (Students with trusting relationships with adults may be directed away from violence and despair and toward hope).
  - Is the student emotionally connected to or disconnected from other students?
  - Has the student previously come to someone's attention or raised concern in a way that suggested he or she needs intervention or support services?
8. Does the student see violence as acceptable or desirable or the only way to solve problems?
  - Does the setting around the student (friends, fellow students, parents, teachers, adults) explicitly or implicitly support or endorse violence as a way of resolving problems or disputes?
  - Has the student been "dared" by others to engage in an act of violence?
9. Is the student's conversation and "story" consistent with his or her actions?
  - Does information from collateral interviews and from the student's own behaviour confirm or dispute what the student says is going on?
10. Are other people concerned about the student's potential for violence?
  - Are those who know the student concerned that he or she might take action based on violent ideas or plans?
  - Are those who know the student concerned about a specific target?
  - Have those who know the student witnessed recent changes or escalations in mood and behaviour?
11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of an attack?
  - What factors in the student's life and/or environment might increase or decrease the likelihood that the student will attempt to mount an attack at school?
  - What is the response of other persons who know about the student's ideas or plan to mount an attack? (Do those who know the student's ideas actively discourage the student from acting violently, encourage the student to attack, deny the possibility of violence, passively collude with an attack, etc.?)