Using Safe and Sound Threat Assessment: *Important Lessons from the Field*

Linda M. Kanan, Ph.D.

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What is Threat Assessment?

- *ONE* type of prevention and intervention *TOOL*
- School guidance comes from federal, state, and professional literature
- Multidisciplinary team process of inquiry
  - Flexible approach to violence prevention
  - Allows a team to make reasoned judgments
- Seen as useful alternative to ineffective zero tolerance approaches or exclusion of students
- Not a psychological exam, based on facts and behavior
- Confronts and *manages* disruptive behavior

What is Threat Assessment?

Every student who makes a threat DOES NOT pose a threat

Basic steps include (CSSRC):
1. Assemble threat assessment team
2. Gather a variety of information
3. Use multiple data sources
4. Organize and analyze the information
5. Determine the level of concern leading to an action plan
6. Develop an action and support plan
7. Continue monitoring the student and the effectiveness of the plan

Why This Workshop?

- On September 3, 2013 a student (KP) was overheard making a threat against his speech & debate coach.
- On September 9, 2013 the threat assessment team met, determined a low level threat, and determined a course of action.
- On December 13, 2013 at 12:33 p.m., the student entered the school looking for the teacher, and fatally shot an innocent student, wounded another, then took his own life when he was confronted by the SRO.

## Arbitration v. Litigation: What Can We Learn?

- Not to assign blame, but to *LEARN!*
- 5 Sections + Appendices
- 21 recommendations to district for continuing improvement
- **31 recommendations to inform best practice at *ALL* schools**

Recommendations for ALL Schools

Linda M. Kanan, Ph.D.
lmkanan@comcast.net
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Prevention:
It takes Multi-systemic Efforts

- Good violence prevention must be conceptualized as:
  - Policies, Practices, Personnel & Programs

1. Prevention planning
2. Awareness training for all
3. Mental health personnel: training & practice
4. Discipline personnel: training & practice
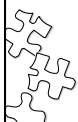
Prevention Planning Recommendations

- Do you have a district level safe schools planning team?
- Do you use objective and student report or climate survey data? – consider your resources & determine *what and how* to measure
- Do you have authority and leadership to conduct threat assessment? A policy? Is it in your job description?
- Do you have ongoing training?

LESSONS LEARNED:

Train for Awareness

**Early Detection and Reporting Begins Prevention and Intervention**

Key Recommendation:
Awareness Training

- Awareness training needs to be explicit, repeated yearly across employee groups, students, parents, and community. It's early detection of potential threats.
  - **_What_** to watch for (behaviors)
  - **_What_** to report
  - **How to report:** within school, district, use of reporting lines (emphasize   )
  - Importance of **_timely reporting!_**

Lessons Learned: Awareness

- ALL faculty and staff need to be trained on a standard protocol to improve understanding of detecting, reporting, and analysis of concerning behaviors.

- For good prevention, awareness is needed about **_various behaviors_** of concern

- Can also be used for awareness of suicide, child abuse, signs of depression, harassment, drug & alcohol use, universal precautions, etc.
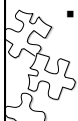
What About FERPA and Threat Assessment?

- FERPA is a federal law the protects privacy of student *educational* records
- Training and knowledge of most school employees is limited
- FERPA allows a balance between safety and privacy
- There are common FERPA misunderstandings (see handout)

Linda M. Kanan, Ph.D.
lmkanan@comcast.net
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Education Records	Not Education Records
Transcripts	Records that are kept in the sole possession of the maker and used only as personal memory aids
Disciplinary Records	Law Enforcement Unit Records
Standardized Test Results	Grades on peer-graded papers before they are collected and recorded by a teacher
Health (including mental heath) and family history records	Records created or received by a school after an individual is no longer in attendance and that are not directly related to the individual's attendance at the school
Records on services provided to students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Employee records that relate exclusively to an individual in that individual's capacity as an employee
Records on services and accommodations provided to students under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the ADA	Information obtained through school official's personal knowledge or observation and not from the student's education records

Information Sharing with Others

- A balance between safety and privacy
- Those with a legitimate educational interest under FERPA:
  - teachers, counselors, school administrators, staff, and selected others
- Health and safety emergency exception
  - Appropriate parties
  - Schools have discretion to determine

Basics of Awareness Training for Students

- Train students on WHAT to report and HOW to report it. Timely reporting!
- *Multiple means for student reporting are encouraged*
  - *Tell a trusted adult, use reporting lines, Safe2Tell, calling, texting, school security, SRO, others*
- Tattling v. telling discussions
- ***Telling keeps people safe*** – for all dangerous behavior

Parent and Community Awareness

- Parents and community members also need awareness
  - *What to watch for, what to report, how to report*
  - *How to get help for their child*
- Partnering with parents through this process

Know the Signs Video
SandyHookPromise.org

LESSONS LEARNED

Threat Assessment:
Process
Training
Documentation

(SEE BEST PRACTICES IN THREAT ASSESSMENT HANDOUT)

Lessons Learned: Threat Assessment

- Every school needs a threat assessment team and an established process
- Everyone on a threat assessment team should be trained! *Including all school administrators & School Resource Officer*
- Mental health and discipline staff need to work together and have **ongoing training**
- Key content components to process & training

Lessons Learned: Threat Assessment

- Unilateral risk assessment should be avoided.
- *If you see something or hear something - say something!*
- The school threat assessment team should have a core membership of
  - administration,
  - mental health, and
  - security/discipline/law enforcement.
  - *Best Practice Recommendation: A district review team*

This Vortex of Information is Essential *(It's Your Team!)*

- A communication vortex is the knowledge base
- Data is directed to this team - centralizes information
- Incidents and responses should be tracked over time - helps determine patterns of behavior
- Data should be collected from *multiple sources within and outside of the school*
- Must *act* promptly on the data

Nicoletti, J. (2007, 2010, 2013)

Core Training Elements for Threat Assessment Teams

- Knowledge of FBI, US Secret Service and US Department of Education Findings
- History of school violence events
- Additional topics:
  - Keeping a skeptical, inquisitive mindset
  - Understanding avenger violence
  - Interviewing, access, training to weapons questioning
  - Evaluating written material
  - Understanding the coding of behaviors
  - Using the 11 Key questions from US Secret Service
  - Scenario practice

Another Example

- Friday, student non-contact day: Teacher reports to principal that 2 girls had conversation with a student who said another students was planning to "shoot up the school".
- Principal calls Assist. Supt. and Sgt/SRO at Police Dept
- Principal looks up both boys on Facebook
- SRO sees the boys near police station, recognizes them, asks them to come in
- SRO interviews students, parents consent to search, "no evidence of plan"
- Girls are interviewed by police the following day, SRO rec. case to be cleared

Another Example

- School does threat assessment on Monday (return to school). Journals and notebooks were reviewed.
- Facebook included photos of boy in military uniform, holding firearms, images of Nazi soldiers and a "like" of a graphic novel character "Johnny the Homicidal Manic"
- Student was told not to discuss threat assessment with anyone at school.
- Teacher told principal class disturbance was created. Student told he had been questioned, drew figure shooting a flame thrower & throwing grenade.

Another Example

- Student suspended
- Principal & AS go to police again that week, told no probable cause for arrest
- District Expulsion hearing
- Later in month, 2 more students and adult outside of school reported threats with specific names, including Principal and other staff members
- All were interviewed by police.

Examining Student Behavior

1. Normal Behaviors
   - Establishing normal

2. Boundary Probing Behaviors
   - Pushing the rules & tolerance levels

3. Social & Psychological Disruption
   - Actions that interfere with functioning of organization and/or cause people to feel intimidated, harassed, fearful, etc.

Nicoletti, J. (2013).

Examining Student Behavior

4. Attack Related Behaviors
   - Desensitization
   - Dehumanization
   - Skill set or armament building
   - Planning

5. Attack Behaviors (proactive or reactive)
   - People
   - Property

Nicoletti, J. (2013).

Watching for Avengers

1. Perceived injustice
2. Feeling victimized
3. Externalization of responsibility
   - Develop a grudge
   - Become obsessed with avenging
   - Leads to avenging action

- Language reveals a lot!
- Watch for the word "because"
- They will broadcast it

Nicoletti, J. (2013)

Lessons Learned:
Threat Assessment Data Gathering

- All data should be directed to the school vortex.
  - *How does it work at YOUR school?*
- Data should be collected from multiple sources within and outside of the school including social media.
  - *What sources do you check?*
  - *How are you checking social media?*
- Concerning actions should all be described in behavioral terms.
- <u>Look at behaviors over time.</u>

Asking Parents About Access to Firearms & Other Weapons

- The "firearms & weapons?" questions

- Who is the best person to have this conversation with parents?

- To the best of their knowledge…
  - ✓ Are they aware?
  - ✓ Are they concerned?
  - ✓ Are they afraid?
  - ✓ Do they monitor child and activities?
  - ✓ Will they check?
  - ✓ Do you need to have someone check?

Use your law enforcement partners, as needed

Linda M. Kanan, Ph.D.
lmkanan@comcast.net

SOME GAPS?

- Disclosure of firearms training
- Parents would not sign release to talk with therapist
- School did not have results of outside evaluation
- Only mom's report of therapist visit
- No student interview related to threat
- No interview with parents apart from meeting
- Police found 8 marksmanship certificates in search of home…ability not disclosed

DATE	AVAILABLE BEHAVIORAL DATA
August 2013	• KP totaled his car after leaving work angry. Mom shares this at threat assessment meeting.
Last week of August 2013	• Mom gets call from man who said someone at this number said he was going to kill her daughter. Mom also received call from an SRO at a middle school advising her that a girl at their school had been threatened by KP.
9.6 – 9.9.13 Date unclear	• Teacher gives KP his math test back (46%) • KP writes "KMFDM" on returned test. Teacher "googles" to find out it is a German band. • AP checks band name • "No pity for the majority" • Talks to KP about it when he is back in school.

NOT REPORTED BY MOTHER

BEFORE THREAT ASSESSMENT MEETING

SIGNIFICANCE NOT NOTED

KMFDM

- Normal? Typical?
- **O**riginally **Kein Mehrheit Für Die Mitleid**, "loosely" translated by the band as "no pity for the majority" is an industrial rock band.
- Years active: 1984–1999, peak popularity (1994–99), 2002–present

3rd page on Google:
"German industrial band KMFDM and Rammstein have been subject to some bad publicity since the tragedy at Columbine High School…Lyrics to some of KMFDM's songs, including "Son of a Gun," had been mentioned on a website maintained by Eric Harris, one of the two gunmen."

Lessons Learned: Threat Management

- Good threat assessment also involves good threat management.
- Any concerning behaviors should have an attached countermeasure.
- Each countermeasure should *be monitored for effectiveness and changed if proven to be ineffective.*
- *Look at history and types of countermeasures over time. Were they effective? Don't repeat failures.*

Designing Action and Support Plans

- Interventions should be equal to the weight of concern
- Include steps for the student and family
- Include a date for formal review of plan – follow up!
- Provide ongoing monitoring of student
  - Daily or weekly check-ins, etc.
  - Follow up on recommendations
- Designate a point of contact for plan, etc.
  Best practice suggestion for *ALL* schools:
  Use of a district level review team

Train to Help Create Effective Intervention Plans

- Consider different types of intervention planning (countermeasures)
  - **T**rees
  - **T**reatment
  - **M**onitoring
  - **P**rotection

- More than just consequences
  - Skill development, build relationships, maximize strengths, etc.
- Maximize use of parent & community resources

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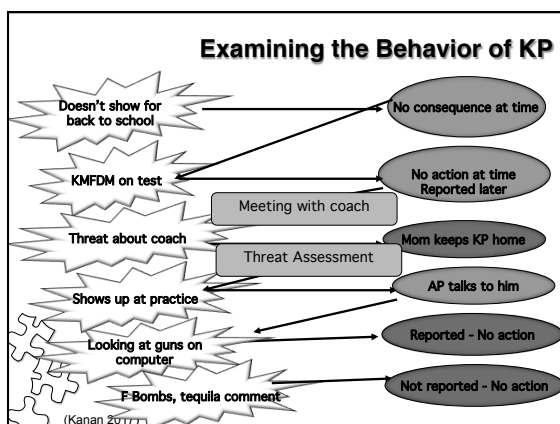lmkanan@comcast.net
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Developing Action and Support Plans

- Consider history of actions and consequences
- Start intense and then adjust based on progress
- "Behavior plans are only as strong as your weakest link" - Be realistic about your resources
- **Build-in formal follow-up meetings**

All students who engage in behavior that prompts a threat assessment should be monitored over time

(Reeves, Kanan, Plog, 2010)

DATE	AVAILABLE BEHAVIORAL DATA
9.9.13	• Mom says at the meeting that KP was assessed at _____Behavioral Health and was told he was "not a threat to himself or others". • Parents indicated he would see private therapist once a week. • Parents did not sign release of information for school to obtain information. Threat assessment has box checked that there was "no known access to weapons".
9.10.13	• Mom emails AP and School Psych asking for IEP for KP • School Psych responds by email at 7:40 a.m. Requests release again to talk to mental health providers and explains IEP process and needing to talk with his therapist. • No further response from parents on IEP or wraparound services.
9.10.13	• KP shows up at Speech and Debate practice that afternoon. Coach tells KP to leave and he leaves. • Coach tells AP. AP told TM he'd make sure KP was clear that he was supposed to stay away from practice.

Examining the Behavior of KP

Doesn't show for back to school — No consequence at time

KMFDM on test — No action at time Reported later

Meeting with coach

Threat about coach — Mom keeps KP home

Threat Assessment

Shows up at practice — AP talks to him

Looking at guns on computer — Reported - No action

F Bombs, tequila comment — Not reported - No action

(Kanan 2017)

Lessons Learned: Documenting the Threat Assessment

- Threat assessment documentation forms should be:
  - standardized
  - completed in detail
  - Legible
  - with supporting information attached, if any

- Threat assessment team members should avoid diagnosing emotions and stay focused on the behavior.
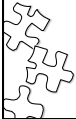
Threat Assessment Documentation

- Key content should be included on documentation form *and* your intervention plan

- Threat Assessment Documentation Form
  - Note important behavioral information on forms
  - Single prompts with space to write additional info
  - Include key indicators for evaluation
  - 11 key questions from US SS
  - Guidance for determination of risk

What Now?
A TIME FOR REVIEW

- ✓ Regular employee training, components, & documentation
  - ✓ Awareness
  - ✓ FERPA
  - ✓ Threat Assessment
- ✓ Threat assessment teams – roles & responsibilities, regular training

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lmkanan@comcast.net
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What Now?
A TIME FOR REVIEW

- ✓ Clear, step-by-step process with a VORTEX
- ✓ Be sure ALL recommended data sources are checked, questioned, & reviewed – including history over time
- ✓ Intervention or action & support plan must have detail, persons responsible, date for review of plan

What Now?
A TIME FOR REVIEW

- ✓ Follow up with student, parents & teachers! *Monitor, monitor, monitor!*
- ✓ Documentation of assessment and intervention plan
- ✓ Review of threat assessments at district level
  - ✓ Do you have a review team or a person *with additional training or experience?*
- ✓ Track and examine your data

Linda M. Kanan, Ph.D.
School Psychologist
School Safety and Education Consultant
lmkanan@comcast.net

Helpful Websites:
Colorado School Safety Resource Center
https://www.colorado.gov/cssrc

US Department of Education, Readiness & Emergency Management for Schools
http://rems.ed.gov/default.aspx

Sandy Hook Promise
http://www.sandyhookpromise.org