

# North Monterey County Unified School District



## District Policy on Threat Assessment and Response Protocol



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# Introduction

The purpose of this plan is to provide practical guidelines for school-based teams with the North Monterey County Unified School District to conduct threat assessments of students who threaten to commit an act of violence.

The Goals of threat assessment are twofold:

1. To maintain a safe environment by preventing an act of violence from taking place.
2. To resolve student conflicts or problems which underlie threatening behavior.

This protocol is for use when dealing with threats made by students. When threats are made by adults, law enforcement should be contacted immediately.

The foundation for a safe school rests on creating a caring community where students feel safe and secure. Safety and security are based on two conditions;

1. an orderly, predictable environment where school staff provide appropriate supervision and discipline; and
2. a school climate where students feel connected to the school and supported by all district staff.

These conditions require an organized, school-wide approach that involves ALL school staff.

A safe and orderly school begins with clear rules and consistent discipline. School should have simple, straightforward rules for student behavior that are disseminated to every student and parent. Students should be expected to learn the rules and understand their purpose.

Threat assessment is heavily dependent on student willingness to report threats to school staff. Often students do not report threats for these reasons:

- they are uncertain who to contact,
- they are unsure if the threat will be carried out,
- they do not want to be regarded as a “snitch” who caused someone to be in trouble.

Students should understand that all staff are available to listen to their concerns and they should be willing to come forward anytime there is a reason to think someone has been harmed or might be in danger of being harmed. Teachers should teach their learners about who to go to and when to go to an adult when they need help and explain the difference between “snitching” on someone and seeking help to prevent someone from being hurt. Staff should also be well informed on the various ways in which threats may be made. Threats can come through social media, verbal comments overheard, gestures, written words in notebooks, papers, essays, texts as well as other ways.

This information should be presented to students at the beginning of the school year and reemphasized as necessary.

# What is a threat?

A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, gestured, or communicated in some other form, such as by text messaging, email, or other electronic means. An expression of intent to harm someone is considered a threat regardless of whether it is communicated to the intended victim(s) and regardless of whether the intended victim is aware of the threat. This protocol does NOT address threats to damage property, threats made by non-students, fights with no threat, or verbiage such as slurs, insults, or verbal abuse that does not constitute a threat. Threats may be implied or stated in an indirect manner if a recipient would reasonably regard the behavior as a threat. When in doubt, treat the expression as a threat and conduct a threat assessment.

## Transient Threat

- Non-genuine expression or intended as joke or figure of speech
- Non-sustainable intent to harm or temporary anger that is resolved
- Conflict is resolved and ends with apology retraction, or clarification

WHEN IN DOUBT, consider threat as substantive and assess further

## Substantive Threat

- Specific plausible details such as a specific victim, time, place, and method
  - Threat has been repeated over time or related to multiple persons
  - Threat is reported as a plan or planning has taken place
  - Recruitment of accomplices or invitation for an audience
  - Physical evidence of intent to carry out threat (lists, drawings, written plan)
  - Student's age and capability of carrying out the threat
  - Student's history of aggressive behavior
  - Credibility of student and witness accounts
- 
- Determine if substantive threat is SERIOUS or VERY SERIOUS
    - Serious: Threat to assault
    - Very serious: Threat to kill, rape, or inflict severe injury or use weapons

# Threat Prevention and Intervention

Targeted school violence can be prevented if enough is known about the student's preparatory behavior.

Schools can focus on universal Tier 1 supports to prevent threats. This can include but is not limited to:

- Clear and consistent discipline code
- School-wide use of positive behavior support
- Schoolwide adult supervision
- Programs to reduce bullying/cyberbullying and teasing
- Cultural/ethnic/racial sensitivity training
- Character development curriculum
- Conflict resolution resources for peer disputes
- Confidential reporting system for students

Schools can provide (Tier 2 or Tier 3) targeted or individualized interventions to meet student needs and prevent threats. This can include but is not limited to:

## TIER 2

- Social skills groups, support for bully victims
- Short-term individual and group counseling
- Mentoring and big sibling programs
- Tutoring and other academic support
- Referral for special education evaluation and services
- Functional Behavioral Assessment and Behavior Support
- Plan for students with special education eligibility

## TIER 3

- Intensive monitoring and supervision
- Ongoing counseling and community-based treatment
- Alternative school placement
- Close coordination with community services
- Referral for special education evaluation and services
- Functional Behavioral Assessment and Behavior Support
- Plan for students with special education eligibility

# School Site Crisis Team

A threat assessment is not a crisis response. If there is indication that violence is imminent (e.g., an individual has a firearm on campus or is on their 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.

## Principal/Assistant Principal

Leads the team. Conducts or assists in conducting the threat assessment. May assign staff listed below to assist with interviewing the targeted individual and/or witness(es). Makes final decisions in response to threat. Works with the Assistant Superintendent or Superintendent as needed.

## School Psychologist/School Mental Health Therapist or Social Worker

Team member, assists in conducting extended threat inquiry. Assist with determining needed strategies or interventions. Assist with monitoring intervention strategies. Licensed Staff may conduct a Mental Health Assessment when needed or requested.

## School Counselor/Coordinator

Team member, lead role in follow-up and monitoring intervention strategies.

## Behavior Team

Team member, reports threats, and supports safety in the moment. May also assist with monitoring student intervention strategies.

## Teachers/Aides/Support Staff

Report threats, provide input to the team. May also assist with monitoring student intervention strategies.

## School Resource Officer

Advises team, responds to illegal actions and emergencies.

# Ongoing Professional Development

To build capacity in the successful implementation of the Threat Assessment Plan, North Monterey County Unified School District and Law Enforcement agencies will partner to offer relevant professional development that will address the following key areas:

- Implementation of Threat Assessment Protocol
- How to identify and report potential threats for all staff at a school site
- Development and operationalization of School Based Crisis Teams to address Threat Assessments
- How to create safe environments that encourage and support reporting of potential threats

This protocol will be distributed at least annually to all staff in conjunction with professional development opportunities.

## School Safety Plan

As with all schools in California, North Monterey County schools are required to develop a comprehensive school safety plan, per California Education Code sections 32280-32289. In addition to the required components in the education code, each school will include the following components in their Comprehensive Safe Schools Plan:

### **Overview of North Monterey County Unified Threat Assessment Plan and Protocol**

The purpose of this plan is to provide practical guidelines for school-based teams within North Monterey County to conduct threat assessments of students who threaten to commit an act of violence. The goals of threat assessment are twofold:

- To maintain a safe environment by preventing an act of violence from taking place.
- To resolve student conflicts or problems that underlie threatening behavior.

These conditions require an organized, school-wide approach that involves ALL school staff. This protocol is for use when dealing with threats made by students. When threats are made by adults, law enforcement will be called immediately.

#### I. What Is a Threat?

A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone. Threats can be spoken, written, or expressed in gestures. Threats may be direct ("I'm going to beat you up") or indirect ("I'm going to get him"). When in doubt about whether a student's behavior is a threat, evaluate it as a threat. A threat assessment is conducted when a person (or persons) threatens to commit a violent act or engages in behavior that appears to threaten an act of violence.

## II. Threats are categorized and described as follows:

### A. Transient threats

Transient threats are statements that do not express a lasting intent to harm someone. Transient threats are intended as either figures of speech or reflect feelings that dissipate in a short period. All transient threats end in an apology or explanation that makes it clear the threat is over.

### B. Substantive threats

Substantive threats are statements that express a continuing intent to harm someone. They indicate a desire and raise concerns that someone is in danger of being harmed beyond the immediate incident. A threat not retracted or resolved should be considered substantive. A serious substantive threat usually involves a fight or a threat to hit someone or harm someone without the use of a weapon. A substantive threat that involves using a weapon such as a firearm or a knife will be classified as very serious because of the potential for severe injury.

## III. Evaluation of Threats and the Threat Assessment Team

Each school has formed its own threat assessment team utilizing staff that is available to them. Typically the team will consist of a school administrator, school resource officer, a mental health professional, certificated and classified staff. The team will evaluate the threat, decide if the threat is transient, substantive, or very serious.



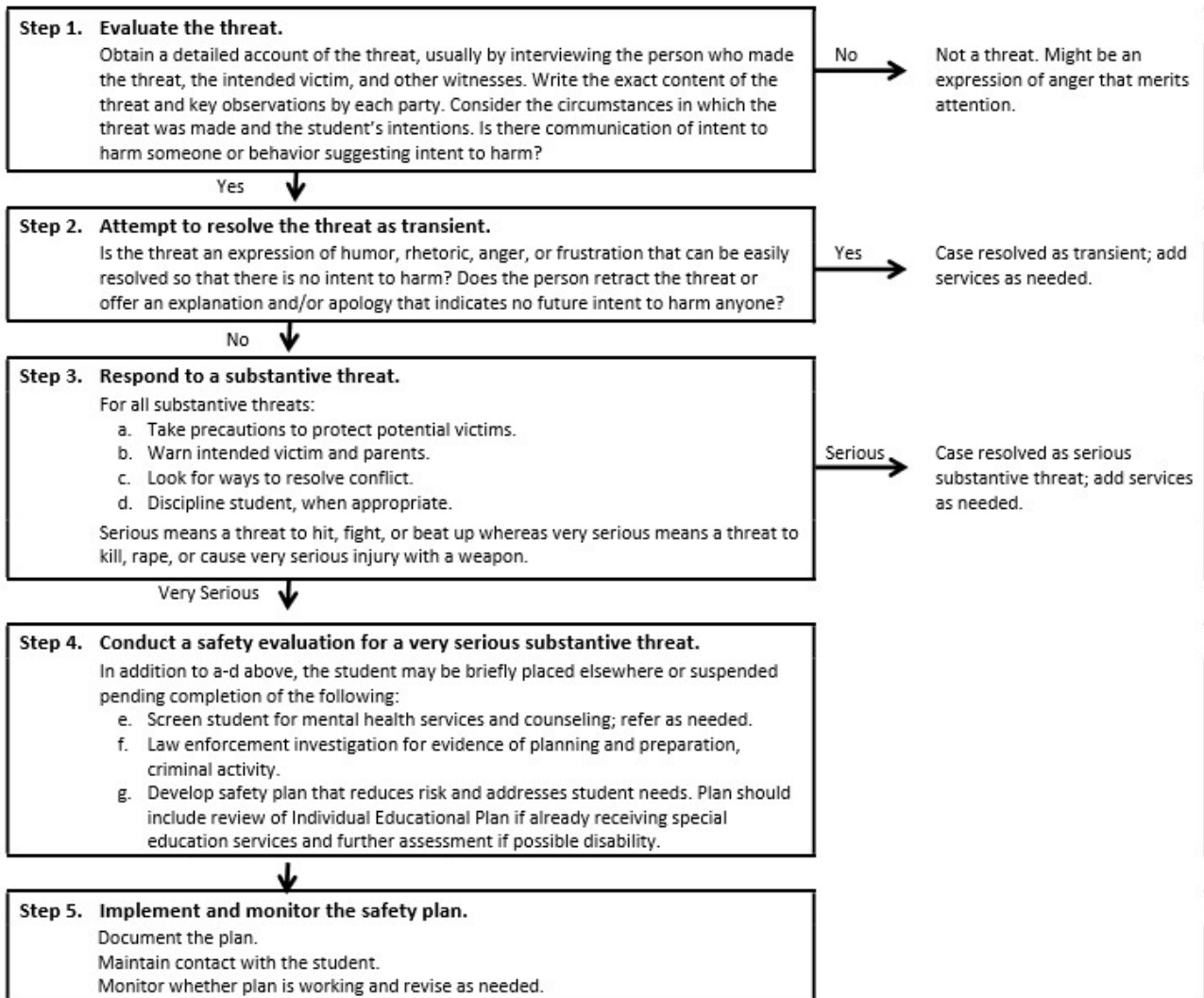
# Threat Assessment Flow Chart

## 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.

# Threat Assessment Documentation

## PART 1 - Information Gathering

Form Completed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date for completed: \_\_\_\_\_

### Information on Student Making Threat:

Name of student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/guardian name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Is there a history of aggressive or violent behavior in school? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Unknown\_\_\_

Is there a history of aggressive or violent behavior away from school? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Unknown\_\_\_

Is there a history of behavior concerns (discipline referrals)? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Unknown\_\_\_

Other information: \_\_\_\_\_

### Information about the Threat:

Has the identified target/victim(s) been identified? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Unknown\_\_\_

Name & Grade of Victim(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Target(s) of the threat (check all that apply): \_\_\_Student \_\_\_Teacher \_\_\_Parent \_\_\_Administrator \_\_\_Other

Number of victim/recipients of threat: \_\_\_one \_\_\_two \_\_\_three \_\_\_four \_\_\_5+

## PART 2 - Findings From Interviews

**Student Interview (Student Making the Threat):** \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Use quotation marks when documenting exact quotes from student(s).

What exactly was said or done: (What happened today when you were [place of incident] ?)

What was meant by what was said or done: (What exactly did you say? What exactly did you do? What was the reason you said or did that? [Probe to find out if there is a prior conflict or history of threat])

Student's understanding of how what was said/done would make the target feel: (What did you mean when you said or did that? How do you think [person who was threatened] feels about what you said or did? [Probe to see if the student believes it frightened or intimidated the person].)

What student now plans: (What are you going to do now? [Probe if the student intends to carry out the threat.])

Other Relevant Information:

**Witness Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Use quotation marks when documenting exact quotes from student(s).

What exactly the student said or did:
What witness thinks student meant:
What the witness thinks was the motive for what the student said/did: (Are you concerned that he or she might actually do it? [Gauge whether the witness feels frightened or intimidated. Probe if witness knows of any prior conflict or history behind the threat.]
Other Relevant Information:

**Threat Recipient(s) Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Use quotation marks when documenting exact quotes from student(s).

What exactly the student said or did, if witnessed:
Nature of relationship with student; whether there is history of conflict or prior threats:
What recipient thinks was motive for what student said/did:
Other Relevant Information:

## PART 3 - Analysis From Findings

1. What are the student's motive(s) and goals?

2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?

3. Has the subject shown inappropriate interest in:

- school attacks or attackers
- weapons (including recent acquisition of any relevant weapon)
- incidents of mass violence (terrorism, workplace violence, mass murderers)

If yes, describe:

4. Has the student engaged in attack-related behaviors such as:

- 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

If yes, describe:

5. Does the student have the means to carry out an act of targeted violence?

6. Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation, and/or despair?

7. Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?

8. Does the student see violence as an acceptable – or desirable – or the only – way to solve problems?

9. Is the student's conversation and "story" consistent with his or her actions?

10. Are other people concerned about the student's potential for violence?

11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of an attack?

12. Are any of the following indicators of potential for violence present?



## PART 5 - Response

Once the threat is classified, follow all corresponding, prescribed responses specified below.

Response to Transient Threat	Response to Serious Threat	Response to Very Serious Threat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Contact Subject student's parents and/or guardians, if necessary</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Notify intended victim(s)'s parents and/or guardians, if necessary</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">See that threat is resolved through explanation, apology, or making amends</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Refer subject student for services through <a href="#">MTSS</a> to resolve problem, if appropriate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Follow discipline procedures as per conduct Policy</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Develop behavior intervention plan (<a href="#">ENG/SPA</a>), <a href="#">brief behavior plan</a>, and/or <a href="#">contract</a>, as appropriate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Refer for school-or community-based services, as appropriate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assign an outside agency to monitor student and status of intervention, as appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Notify subject student's parents and/or guardians</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide direct supervision of subject student until parents and/or guardians assume control</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Caution the subject student about the consequences of carrying out the threat</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Protect and notify intended victim(s) and parents and/or guardians of victim(s)</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Consult with SRO to assist in monitoring/supervising subject student and determining need for law enforcement action</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Notify superintendent or assistant superintendent if superintendent unavailable</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Follow discipline procedures as per conduct policy</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If needed, refer subject student for <a href="#">mental health assessment</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assign a team member to monitor student and status of intervention, as appropriate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If warranted by findings of mental health assessment, develop/<a href="#">monitor safety/action plan</a> -- <a href="#">SAMPLE</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Develop <a href="#">Escalation Cycle Management Plan</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Notify law enforcement per regulation to contain threat; and consult with School Resource Officer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide direct supervision of subject student until removed from campus by law enforcement or parent/guardian</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Caution the subject student about the consequences of carrying out the threat</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Protect and notify intended victim(s) and parents and/or guardians of victim(s)</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Notify subject student's parents and/or guardians</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Notify superintendent or assistant superintendent if superintendent unavailable</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Follow discipline procedures as per conduct policy</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Refer subject student for <a href="#">mental health assessment</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Notifying parents of requirements for readmission to school, and hold reentry meeting with focus on restorative practices</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assign team member to monitor student and intervention/<a href="#">safety and action plan</a> -- <a href="#">SAMPLE</a></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Develop <a href="#">Escalation Cycle Management Plan</a></li> </ul>

### Threat Response:

Additional response steps and comments:

Printed Name of Administrator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Administrator: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Signature indicates agreement with identified level of threat and the above actions have been taken.)

Reminder, please log behavior incidents into school-wide data collection systems. Initial \_\_\_\_\_

# Physical Management

Each crisis response team will receive annual training in physical management procedures utilizing a district and county approved system. The training will cover disengagement, de-escalation, and physical management. The focus is on prevention, safety, and humane, supportive, evidence-based interventions.

## Restraint/Seclusion

Physical restraint is defined as “a personal restriction that immobilizes or reduces the ability of a pupil to move his or her torso, arms, legs, or head freely” (*Education Code* Section 49005.1[f][1]).

Seclusion is defined as “the involuntary confinement of a pupil alone in a room or area from which the pupil is physically prevented from leaving” (*Education Code* Section 49005.1[i]).

North Monterey County Unified School District utilizes the least restrictive and most positive approach to responding to behavioral concerns. These procedures are only to be used as a last resort, if necessary, to keep the student and/or others safe from harm.

If restraint or seclusion are utilized, it is the responsibility of the school administrator to ensure that this is documented in the school-wide data collection system for behavioral concerns.
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## Behavior Support Plan

The team should meet to consider and/or develop a behavior support plan for the learner within 2 days of the incident if the learner does not have a behavior support plan in place, and within 2 weeks if the learner does have a plan in place.