

Making Schools Safer: Implementing Threat Assessment

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Shortly after the school shooting at Columbine High School, the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools partnered to examine the issue of school shootings. That partnership led to a landmark research project called the “*Safe School Initiative (SSI)*” to examine “the thinking, planning and other pre-attack behaviors engaged in by attackers”. The study provided a wealth of information related to threat assessment in schools. A significant finding in the *Safe School Initiative* found that in many of the school shootings students were had knowledge of another student’s plan to engage in violence but did not report those plans to an adult. Later, the Secret Service and the Department of Education published a second study that examined why students either reported concerns about a fellow student or withheld the information. It also identified aspects of school climate that either enabled students’ sharing of information or prevented it. The Secret Service acknowledged it is impossible to prevent all violent incidents in schools but recommended that schools create a *Comprehensive Prevention Plan* that can reduce the likelihood of a violent incident occurring.

Much of the focus of a prevention plan is effectively addressing school climate by enhancing the level of trust between staff and students, building relationships and ensuring that every student has a strong, positive relationship with at least one adult within the school. Another important aspect of a prevention plan is the creation and implementation of a school-based, interdisciplinary Threat Assessment Team that has the ability to conduct threat assessment inquiries. Threats can be either transient or substantive, and the team has the ability to conduct an individualized assessment of each. Effective threat assessment is focused on both risk reduction and prevention. This workshop will:

- Review the research conducted by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education;
- Look at the Threat Assessment model created by the Safe School Initiative;
- Examine the blueprint for a Comprehensive Prevention Plan that schools can implement.