



1.04 Violence, Threat, and Risk Assessment

1. General Administration - Administrative Procedure Manual

The Pine Creek School Division is committed to providing a safe and positive learning environment where students, staff, parents and others feel safe and respected. Successful intervention into incidents of threat-related behaviours is dependent upon an immediate and coordinated assessment of each individual situation.

Threat-related behaviours include but are not limited to: protocol

- serious violence
- verbal, written, or electronically transmitted threats to harm others
- possession of weapons (including replicas)
- bomb threats
- fire setting

Violence, Threat and Risk Assessment is a means to comprehensively examine the potential and magnitude of threatening and violent behaviour that would impact the safety and health of individuals within the school.

The Pine Creek School Division will focus on preventive and proactive strategies that model and teach appropriate behaviour. The Division believes that all students and staff have the right to safety. Any behaviour by individuals that threaten this safety will be dealt with seriously. Pine Creek School Division has developed a Violence Threat and Risk Assessment Guide that outlines procedures to be used by school division personnel when assessing the level of risk for violence towards self or others. The VTRA Guide will be made available to all divisional staff through divisional communication systems, both electronic and traditional.

The Principal shall ensure fair notice of the Violence Threat and Risk Assessment procedure is provided to staff members, students and parents/guardians.

Pine Creek School Division will maintain a training schedule to ensure that all administrative staff and other school/divisional team members are adequately trained in threat assessment procedures. Pine Creek School Division will maintain a budget to cover the training and release costs to ensure trained team members are available to conduct risk assessments as necessary and in a timely manner. When a Violence, Threat, and Risk Assessment is conducted, it will be reported to the Board at the next regular meeting.

Pine Creek School Division Violence, Threat, and Risk Assessment Protocol will be reviewed annually to ensure that it is aligned with current best practice. Reporting on the annual review and any changes to the protocol resulting from the annual review shall be reported to the Board of Trustees and the second meeting of October in each school year.

Rationale

This protocol supports collaborative planning among students, families, schools and community agencies to reduce violence and to reflect safe, caring and restorative approaches. The effective implementation of this protocol will support collaborative planning to reduce school violence and ensure safe and caring school communities. It fosters sharing of information about students who may pose a risk for violence towards themselves or others while respecting an individual's right to privacy to the fullest extent possible. The protocol promotes the implementation of supportive interventions and preventative planning processes. The timely sharing of information with school, family, and community partners regarding students at risk for violence will ensure that supportive plans are put in place.

Fair and Due Notice

School Principals shall include a reference to the Division's Violence, Threat and Risk Assessment (VTRA) procedure in their school handbook, and will provide a link to the current Violence, Threat and Risk Assessment Procedure posted online on the Pine Creek School Division website. Schools will also include information about "fair and due notice" in their school handbooks. Parents of a student suspected of making a threat will be contacted once the data necessary to confirm a threat or violent incident has been gathered and the level of violence potential has been determined. Schools will use the sample "Fair Notice Notification" letter to parents – Appendix K.

The Violence, Threat and Risk Assessment Procedure will be reviewed by Principals with all staff at the beginning of each school year.

Expectation for Responsible Reporting

Any student or staff member having knowledge of threat-making behaviour on the part of any individual(s) or having reasonable grounds to believe there is a potential for violent behaviour, shall report the information to the school Principal or designate.

No action will be taken against the reporter unless an allegation is made maliciously or without reasonable grounds. In cases where a report is made maliciously, the reporter shall be dealt with accordingly.

Duty to Respond

The Principal or designate shall respond to all threat-related behaviours by taking immediate action as deemed necessary to ensure student and staff safety.

Duty to Victims and Others

The Threat Assessment Team shall ensure that appropriate support is provided to the recipients of any threat-making behaviour.

The Principal or designate shall notify school staff, students and parents of the outcome of a threat assessment on a "need to know basis", within a reasonable time period.

Students with Complex or Special Needs

When students with complex needs engage in threat-making behaviours, their level of development and understanding needs to be taken into account. In making the decision whether or not to activate the VTRA process, the Principal and Superintendent/Student Services Coordinator will consult the Threat Assessment Training materials for information on dealing with students with special needs.

Early Elementary Students

Generally most threat-related behaviour exhibited by an elementary-aged student would fall into the category of “worrisome behaviour”. However, if there is a significant increase in baseline behaviour, weapons possession or clear, direct and plausible threats, the VTRA protocol will be activated. Simply because a child/youth is of elementary age does not mean they cannot pose a risk.

Threat Assessment Team Composition

The In School Threat Assessment Team (ISTAT) will consist of:

1. The Principal or designate, or student services coordinator.
2. A trained division clinician.
3. One additional trained staff member.

The Divisional Threat Assessment Team (DTAT) will consist of:

Two to three trained school/division team members from other schools or division departments.

Depending on level of risk, other team members or interagency personnel may become involved, including:

1. RCMP
2. Community Mental Health
3. Child and Family Services
4. Children’s Disabilities Services
5. Physician
6. Youth justice/Probation Services
7. Other partner agency

Training

Pine Creek School Division will provide training opportunities to administrative staff, clinicians and other school/divisional team members in Violence Threat and Risk Assessment (eg. the Kevin Cameron model). Staffs who are trained in threat assessment will be advised of changes to the Pine Creek School Division VTRA Guide. If changes are significant, this will occur through a formal training session. If changes do not significantly affect VTRA processes, school Principals will be apprised of changes during a regular Administrative Council meeting. Principals will be required to inform their VTRA-trained staff of these changes. The Student Services Coordinator will inform clinicians of changes.

The VTRA Guide is not a substitute for training in the field of Violence Threat and Risk Assessment (VTRA). The Guide is intended for the use of Pine Creek School Division threat assessment teams at the school and division levels in collaboration with outside community agencies.

All members of the Threat Assessment Team will be trained in the theory and practice of child/youth threat-risk assessment.

Funding and Release time

Pine Creek School Division will maintain a budget to cover the training and release costs to ensure trained team members are available to conduct risk assessments as necessary and in a timely manner. Team members will be released to conduct assessments at the discretion of the Superintendent or Student Services Coordinator.

Roles and Responsibilities

Staff members will ensure the safety of all staff and students, and report any threat-making behaviour immediately to the Principal or designate.

The Principal will ensure the safety of all students and staff, and then inform the Superintendent, or in his or her absence, the Student Services Coordinator. A collaborative decision will be made as to whether or not to activate the In-School Threat Assessment Team process.

The Superintendent will inform the Student Services Coordinator. The Principal, Student Services Coordinator, and Superintendent will maintain ongoing communication and collaboration.

The Student Services Coordinator will work with the In School Threat Assessment Team at the school, consulting with the Principal through stages of the threat assessment process, and maintain ongoing communication with the Superintendent. The Student Services Coordinator will assemble the Divisional Threat Assessment Team, if deemed necessary through consultation with ISTAT, Principal, and Superintendent.

A trained VTRA clinician is responsible for monitoring the sense of safety and well-being of the recipient(s), victim(s) or target(s) of the threat, and ensure that supports are provided as necessary.

Pre-Suspension Intervention Caution

It is imperative that Principals develop a primary intervention plan to manage threat-makers prior to an out-of-school suspension. An out-of-school suspension can add to risk, as it can often be seen as the “last straw” and/or justification for carrying out a threat by a high risk student.

Unless the student of concern poses an imminent or obvious safety concern (in which case he/she will be the responsibility of the police), the ISTAT should be activated and data should be collected before a suspension is considered. The student of concern should be supervised by a trusted adult in an area where he/she feels safe and secure while data is collected.

Evidence has shown that a poorly timed out-of-school suspension is high risk as this intervention may be viewed by a “primed” student as the “final straw”. It is in this stage that many threat makers decide to finalize a plan to terrorize a school or attack a specific target. Fluidity between the suicidal and homicidal domains is also a concern.

To be clear, the suspension does not *cause* the violence to occur but creates the necessary context for a high risk student, who is already struggling with suicidal and/or homicidal ideation, to take the final step from planning to action.

Violence Threat and Risk Assessment is not a disciplinary measure. However, suspension may be recommended by the ISTAT or DTAT as an intervention strategy. Careful consideration should be given to where the suspension will be served. If parent(s) or guardian(s) are unable or unwilling to provide the level of supervision or support deemed appropriate to reduce risk and ensure the safety of the school, community resources may be mobilized to provide the level of support required.

Immediate Harm/Danger

(e.g. person wielding a knife, gun, or other weapon against others)

- Call 911.
(911 calls are made in the event that you believe that others are in immediate danger)
- Ensure all students and staff are safe.
- Inform the Principal or acting Principal.
- Initiate lockdown procedures if appropriate.
- Detain student(s) who are involved.
- Do not allow access to coats, backpacks, lockers, cellular phones or other electronic devices.
- Consult with the Superintendent or Student Services Coordinator.
- Plan for a minimum of two hours to complete the In School VTR Assessment.

Importance of School Culture

School culture and/or climate are widely acknowledged to be a key to creating a safe environment. By placing a strong emphasis on safety, tolerance, communication and programming designed to facilitate social responsibility, we can create an environment where violence is less likely to occur. Environments such as these are characterized by systems that allow for early identification of potential problems.

Activation of the School and Divisional Threat Assessment Teams

See Appendix A for a non-exhaustive listing of examples of situations which are intended to help school and divisional personnel make the determination of when to activate the VTRA process. It is important to carefully consider each and every case individually, to ensure the most appropriate response. The Principal, in consultation with the Superintendent, will make the decision to assemble the ISTAT.

Non-School Hours Cases

If information is received regarding a threat that is “clear, direct and plausible” before or after school hours, police will be called, and parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified immediately so that they can take steps to inform and protect the target(s). The Principal will then follow all other steps, including contacting the Superintendent, or in his or her absence, the Student Services Coordinator. The ISTAT or DTAT will be activated if the situation is deemed to have potential to pose an ongoing risk to member(s) of the school community. Open communication between the school, police, families and community agency partners is essential.

Involving Parents in Threat/Risk Assessments

Parent/Guardian Notification – Student of Concern

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of the threat-maker should be notified at the earliest opportunity. Specifically, after the ISTAT has collected the data necessary to confirm a threat or violent incident has occurred and has determined the level of violence potential.

Notification of parent(s)/guardian(s) is meant to activate a collaborative process between home and school which will serve to more fully assess the student and plan for appropriate intervention when necessary. The age of the student is an important consideration in the timing of contact with the parents. Generally, the parents of younger students may require a notification earlier in the process.

Delay of Parent/Guardian Notification

If a student discloses child abuse during the threat assessment process, Child and Family Services should be called to collaborate with the ISTA team on the appropriate timing (if at all) of parent/guardian notification as part of their child protection investigation.

Parent/Guardian Notification – Victim or Target

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of the target(s) should be notified at the earliest opportunity. Specifically, once the ISTAT has collected the data necessary to confirm a threat or violent incident has occurred, and has determined the level of violence potential, the Principal will contact the parents. If the threat is not clear, direct, and plausible, data collection will be conducted to determine the level of risk before the parent(s)/guardian(s) are notified, thereby preventing unnecessarily traumatizing individuals when no risk is present. A trained VTRA clinician is responsible for monitoring the sense of safety and well-being of the recipient(s), victim(s) or target(s) of the threat, and ensuring that supports are provided as necessary. This contact with parents will briefly outline the facts as they have been established, safety precautions that have been taken, and outline next steps in the VTRA process.

Often the target, and his/her parent(s) or caregiver(s) are fearful or traumatized by the situation. Therefore, notification should be done with skill, tact, and planning. In consultation with the threat assessment team, the Principal may designate member of the professional staff to contact parents.

If the threat is “clear, direct and plausible” or the ISTAT or DTAT feels violence may be imminent, notification will occur after the target(s) are secure and protected from potential harm.

Anonymous Threats

Anonymous threats are typically threats to commit a violent act against an individual(s), specific group or site (i.e. school). They may be found written on bathroom walls or stalls, spray painted on the side of schools, posted on the internet, letters left in a conspicuous place, etc. All such threats will be reported to the Principal or designate.

In-School Threat Assessment Team (ISTAT – Stage 1)

The **In-School Threat Assessment Team (ISTAT)** will consist of trained individuals. The team should include a Principal designate, a clinician, and a member of the school staff. If deemed necessary by the ISTAT and available to attend, the RCMP will be asked to be part of the process. If unavailable, a member of the team will attempt to consult with the RCMP by phone. Note: The RCMP ultimately determines their availability and level of involvement in the threat assessment process, not the school team. The ISTAT will assess whether a risk/threat exists and develop an intervention plan to support the student(s) involved, the greater student body, and staff, as necessary.

Information collected will be recorded on the appropriate Interview Forms (Appendix D), In School Threat Assessment Questions - Stage 1 (Appendix E), In-School Threat Assessment Summary- Stage 1 form (Appendix C); recommendations made will be recorded on the Stage 1 Intervention Plan (Appendix F). These, along with all documentation and completed forms, will be compiled and stored by the Student Services Coordinator.

If the ISTAT determines that a student poses a medium or high level of concern to the safety of other student(s) or staff, the Principal (or designate), in consultation with Superintendent, will activate the Divisional Threat Assessment Team process.

Divisional Threat Assessment Team (DTAT – Stage 2)

The Divisional Threat Assessment Team (DTAT) will consist of trained individuals, including at least two trained staff members from other schools in the division. The DTAT will work in consultation with the ISTAT. The DTAT may involve community partners through membership on the team, or through consultation. This could include CFS, Community Mental Health, Probation Services, RCMP, etc.

The Student Services Coordinator will assemble the DTAT. When assembling the team, effort will be made to ensure a balanced perspective of classroom teachers, administration, and student services personnel.

The Student Services Coordinator will determine the date, time and location for convening the DTAT and gather any data collected by the ISTAT. The DTAT will be charged with evaluating the level of risk to the safety of students and staff and making recommendations that support risk reduction and student support. The DTAT will examine information gathered by the ISTAT team, review interventions and supports that have been put in place. The DTAT may consult directly with the ISTAT to clarify information or ask additional questions. The DTAT may choose to re-interview threat-maker(s), target(s)/victim(s), witnesses, staff members, parents, etc. to gather additional information. They may interview others who have not yet been interviewed.

The DTAT and ISTAT will work in collaboration to recommend any interventions deemed necessary as a result of their investigation. The school and school division will be responsible for implementing recommendations, which could include re-entry plans, suspension, increased supervision, safety contracts, safety plans, student success plans, bus monitor, etc.

Information collected will be recorded on the Divisional Threat Assessment Questions - Stage 2 form (Appendix G); recommendations made will be recorded on the Stage 2 Intervention Plan (Appendix H). Other forms could include Risk Management/Student Support Plan (Appendix I), a Behaviour Intervention Plan, etc. These, along with all documentation and completed forms, will be compiled and stored by the Student Services Coordinator.

Acknowledgements

Information in this protocol reflects the work of J. Kevin Cameron, Director of the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (www.cctra.com).

Appreciation is expressed to Chinook Country Student Health Partnership, School District 18, New Brunswick Education Board, Avon Maitland District School Board and Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board.