Threat Assessment Glossary

The world of threat assessment and behavioral intervention has unique language and terminology that is important to understand when communicating between departments. If a large part of the threat assessment process is building connections among departments and various stakeholders, using a common language is essential.

Actionability
The likelihood that an individual has access to the means and materials to carry out an attack.

Action/Time Imperative
The time, location, and movement toward an attack location

Affective Violence
Violence driven by emotions in an impulsive and emotional response to an environmental stressor or perceived threat.

Aggrieved
The individual blames others for most of their problems and difficulties in life. They carry resentments and escalate to make those they see as responsible pay for their actions. These actions can be perceived or actual; most commonly, they are based on some general truth.

Alone
Refers to isolation and the inability to form social connections despite the desire and attempts. This escalates to feelings of hopelessness, irritability, and anger at being separated from what seems to come so easily for others. The outsider status and extreme isolation coincide with teasing and thoughts of suicide or extreme action.

Americans with Disability Act
The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 established comprehensive legislation covering civil rights for people with disabilities. It is published in the United States Code and is often referred to by the titles and chapters of the code that contain the law. More information about the ADA is available at http://www.ada.gov.

Anchors
Supportive measures that help prevent the escalation in violence. Also called protector or stabilizing factors.

Anchor Bias
When we become anchored or locked on a particular piece of data or first impression on a case and are unwilling to consider rival, alternative hypotheses.

Approach
The movement toward a target, beginning with fantasizing about harming them and obtaining small items needed for an attack (extended magazines, research material, chains/locks). As they progress, they overcome their hesitancy and talk with others about their plan. Risk-taking behavior increases as they continue to escalate without considering their

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well-being. In the late stages of approach, they conduct test runs, engage in physical violence/threats, and solidify details for their full attack.

Approach Behavior The type, frequency, and intensity an attacker engages in to become physically close to the target.

Availability Bias The tendency to use easily available data to make decisions.

Behavioral Indicator An observable action that may demonstrate that the individual is on the pathway to violence.

Behavioral Threat Assessment Addresses the level of dangerousness present in a threat that has been made verbally, on social media, in writing, or through artistic expression

Bias Bias is our tendency to see the world from our particular lens of experience. It can lead us to ignore the evidence or make assumptions not based on evidence. It can impact what we remember and what witnesses remember. It can create blinders for BIT team members and impact their ability to build rapport, connect, and create safe/neutral spaces. While we can never remove bias, we can train to make us more aware of how bias can affect decision-making.

Blaze The desire on the part of an attacker to end their life in a public, extreme manner that will, in their mind, justify the pain they have experienced or in the service of some perceived larger cause (a "blaze of glory"). There is increasing talk or posting on social media about their growing frustrations or dedication to a cause. As this reaches extremes, they are overwhelmed and trapped by pain or express a fanatical dedication to a cause. There is a detailed plan and commitment to a final action to send a message to others.

Breach A gap or break in security that is often exploited or circumvented in an attack.

Blind Spot Bias Having knowledge gaps in your process. This is the tendency to miss crucial elements of a case because of an inability to see the data from a balanced and reasonable perspective.

BIT Behavioral intervention team.

CARE Campus assessment, resources, and evaluation.

Catalyst These negative events occur and act like the catalyst in a chemical reaction, speeding up the escalation towards violence, like the loss of status, opportunity (playing on a sports team or going on a field trip), relationship, or finances can act to further an attack plan. Unlike free fall, catalyst events occur more suddenly.

Checklist The physical manifestation of fantasy rehearsal and brainstorming what would be needed to punish or harm a person, place, or system. Checklists

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become increasingly informed by research and specificity around the timing and location of an attack and the materials needed. There may also be a shutting down of bank accounts, phones, or social media accounts, or other recurring memberships or involvement with the anticipation of an upcoming event.

Confirmation Bias   Deciding first and then finding facts to support it.

Consumed   A set way of thinking and escalating toward action. The individual has difficulty accepting alternative explanations for events, they engage in harmful debate with others and increasingly look for ways to widen their impact and solidify their viewpoint. This escalates to include a quality of obsession and a spiraling negative impact on other aspects of their work, school, social relationships, and family. They seek the opportunity to troll and create demonstrations to push this view on others. They not only have a hardened point of view, but this becomes a defining characteristic of their entire person. When limits are set by the workplace, school, or police, they move quickly past these, feeling justified in their actions because of their locked perspective.

Costuming   The process of creating a persona or mask that defines or hides the true identity of those planning violence. As an attacker prepares, they often find clothing, tactical gear, and accessories they will need during the attack. This may start with an affiliation to a group like the Proud Boys or Attomwaffen and eventually involves purchasing ballistic plates, knee and elbow pads, harnesses, and/or ammunition containers. In some attacks, they have taken on the appearance of figures such as the Dark Knight, Joker, and characters from *The Matrix*.

Credible threat   A threat that is deemed actionable and substantive. A threat that is likely to occur without intervention.

Cultural Competency   The ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from different cultures and with beliefs different than your own.

Defiant   At first, defiance may be a general tendency to take an alternative path when compared with how others approach those in authority. This escalates into more frequent incidents with authorities and society in general. Incidents then involve more substantive threats, violent actions, and conditional ultimatums.

DEI-B   Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Direct Threat   A threat made verbally or in a written format like a letter or on social media. The individual may start with vague references or memes and escalate to mentions of a specific place, time, and what they will do. As

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they escalate, the threat is made with a sense of urgency and repeated in multiple formats.

DOS   Dean of students.

Dunning-Kruger Effect   The tendency to over or underestimate our abilities in certain areas based on your experience.

Duty to Warn   Tarasoff guides licensed psychotherapists and counseling/ medical staff around sharing confidential information in a client/patient relationship regarding an imminent, lethal threat. This policy does not apply to the police or most school officials. In a Tarasoff duty to warn/protect, there is negligence if a therapist fails to take steps to protect the potential victim from a patient who has made a specific threat against them. This may include warning the victim but may also be met by increasing the frequency of therapeutic visits or hospitalizing the patient. Importantly, this protective duty overrides concerns about maintaining patient confidentiality

Energy Burst Behavior   An increase in the intensity of behaviors prior to an attack.

Encouragers   These are often third parties met on the internet, chatrooms, social media, or in-person meetings, such as local white supremacists, KKK, or other violent hate groups. The encouragement progresses from the pursuit of ideas and philosophies to support acquiring weapons, developing an attack plan, and punishing those who they see as responsible for societal problems.

FERPA   Family Education Rights and Privacy Act. This federal law (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) governs the gathering, maintenance, and accessibility of educational records. Schools need written permission from the student to release educational records to anyone other than the student. Schools may disclose records, without consent, to certain parties under specific conditions, including complying with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena, to appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies, and to state and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific state law.

Fixation/Focus   Threat assessment terms that refer to a narrowing down on a particular target (e.g., fixation on women, focus on women in a sorority house).

Free Fall   Unlike catalyst events, which are more sudden, free fall describes a more general set of problems like failing supports, mental illness flair-ups, and a general sense of hopelessness. The free fall becomes more concerning as multiple, chronic problems intersect, eventually creating an inability to function and a lack of hope that things will improve.

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HIPAA	Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. The HIPAA Privacy Rule requires covered entities to protect individuals' health records and other identifiable health information. Of primary importance to threat assessment professionals are the security, accountability, and confidentiality of medical records covered by this act. The rule permits use and disclosure of protected health information, without an individual's authorization or permission, for national priority purposes to law enforcement officials under specific circumstances (See 45 C.F.R. § 164.512). Disclosure must also be made to someone believed to be able to prevent or lessen a threat or to law enforcement if the information is needed to identify or apprehend an escapee or violent criminal.
Hopeless	This describes a sense of worry and uncertainty about the future, along with difficulty focusing and pervasive feelings of sadness. As hopelessness increases, they feel trapped and eventually are unable to function and/or experience growing suicidal thoughts.
Howlers	Individuals who may display inappropriate or threatening behavior but do not intend to follow the path toward violence.
Hunters	Individuals flowing the path toward violence who behave in ways that further their goal.
In Group/Out Group	Gathering data and making decisions that are favorable toward someone who is like you.
Impulsive	In moving from an idea to an action, the individual progresses quickly without weighing the impact of their actions. They increasingly ignore those in positions of authority or limits that have been set. In the more extreme escalation, the student acts despite a risk to their life.
Incel	This term stands for "involuntary celibate" and represents a range of thinking and behaviors from social awkwardness and difficulty forming connections with women to hardline misogyny and active threats to punish them for rejecting the person's attempts at dating.
Inhibitors	Anything that serves to decrease the likelihood of the person escalating to violence. Also called buffers, anchors, or protective factors.
Irrational	Thinking becomes increasingly impaired due to paranoia, odd or obsessive thoughts, delusions, and/or a general separation from reality. This may include language about aliens, government organizations surveilling them, incongruent or poorly organized speech, and the experience of hallucinations (voices, visions, smells, etc.) that may command and/or demand they take violent action.
JACA	Justification, Alternatives, Consequences and Ability. This acronym, created by Decker, helps determine the level of threat. J: Does the person

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feel justified in using violent means? A: Does the subject perceive that he or she has alternatives to rectify the grievance? C: How salient are the consequences of this activity to the subject? A: Does the subject believe they can carry out the intended violence?

Last Resort Warning Behavior	A decision to ends one's life and make final arrangements prior to a targeted violence attack.
Leakage	Intentional or accidental communication to a third party of intent to do harm, including clues and details about their existing attack plan. At first, these are vague hints at frustration, growing unhappiness, and unfairness, with no mention of a specific time, place, or target of an attack. Leakage increases as they vent frustrations verbally/online and demand justice. Threats then become specific and lethal with a time and location mentioned.
Legacy Token	Writing or social media content prepared by a perpetrator prior to an attack that are typically designed to be found following the attack as a way to share a message. The legacy token is a manifesto, written text, online blog, video project, piece of art, diary, or journal created prior to an attack and left for someone to find after the attack. It clarifies the motives of the attacker or better defines the attacker's message of infamy.
Lethality	The dangerousness of the attack plan is determined by the level of access to deadly weapons and materials. At the early stage, access to deadly weapons may require obtaining them from friends or other locations. As lethality escalates, weapons are acquired along with ammunition and secondary materials needed for an attack, like high-capacity magazines, security schedules, or counter-surveillance measures.
LOA	Leave of absence.
Location	This signifies the place where an attack will occur. This may be vague and general at first, perhaps even at a place where the attacker does not have access. With escalation, the location becomes increasingly specific, and the threatener has conducted research and planning on access. They may conduct walkthroughs of the location and look at overcoming any obstacles.
Microaggression	These are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership.
	Microassaults: Conscious and intentional actions or slurs, such as using racial epithets, displaying swastikas, or deliberately serving a white person before a person of color in a restaurant.
	Microinsults: Verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or

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identity. An example is an employee who asks a colleague of color how she got her job, implying she may have landed it through an affirmative action or quota system.

Microinvalidations: Communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color. For instance, white people often ask Asian Americans where they were born, conveying the message that they are perpetual foreigners in their own land.

Novel Aggression	An act of violence that appears unrelated to any targeted violence pathway warning behavior and committed for the first time. Such behaviors may be utilized to test the ability of the subject to commit a violent act and may be a measure of response tendency, the motivation to act on the environment,29or a behavioral tryout
Objectification	There is a depersonalization regarding how others are seen, with an increasing tendency to see them as "less than" or unworthy of basic consideration. This manifests in name-calling and the use of racist, misogynistic, or bigoted language. As objectification escalates, there are increased work, school, and home conflicts, with threats and negative actions. They eventually see their target as undeserving of any consideration and simply as an object in the way of their goal.
Organization	This denotes threats that move from vague and undefined to narrow and specific. Poorly organized threats are more reactive and often involve many targets and people. Escalations in organization define the attack to a singular target and are consistent and repeated.
Pathway to Violence	A series of sequential steps – from its beginning with a felt grievance, to violent ideation, research and planning, specific preparations for violence, critical breaches of security or other boundaries, to a concluding attack – indicating that an individual is progressing towards an act of targeted violence.
Penetration	The individual begins to study the vulnerabilities of their target or targets to determine how to increase the lethality and success of their plan. As this escalates, they study security measures and develop ways to overcome them. They select a time for the attack and often create a manifesto or legacy token memorializing their study.
PI	Principal investigator or advisor.
Planning	Involves writing down or thinking about what the student may do to correct an injustice or seek revenge. Planning intensifies as the threatener focuses on details, gathering intel, and acquiring the items they need for an attack. As planning escalates, the student clarifies and improves tactics

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to increase damage and overcome potential obstacles. Secondary sites, counter-surveillance measures, and contingency plans are developed.

POC
Person of concern (typically used in law enforcement, though POC may also refer to a person of color outside of law enforcement).

Predatory Violence
Also known as targeted, instrumental, mission-oriented, tactical, or strategic violence. Describes those who do not act based on the immediacy of their emotions but rather plan over weeks, months, and years, acquiring the data needed to carry out their assault.

Psychological Assessment
Focus on evaluating mental illness or functional behaviors. These are used when a diagnosis of a mental illness is sought, medication needs are evaluated, testing or assessment is required for accommodation, or a level of care assessment is urgently needed for danger to self or others.

Reporting Party
Often used in sexual assault or harassment cases to refer to the person making the report. Also commonly referred to as the victim.

Research
This involves the general interest in and reading or viewing materials about past attacks. As the individual escalates, research becomes more specifically narrowed to weapons, tactical gear, scouting the location, and penetration testing (looking at vulnerabilities in security, patrols, and cameras).

Responding Party
Often used in sexual assault or harassment cases to refer to the person who the report is made against. Also commonly referred to as the accused or the perpetrator.

Rhetoric
Refers to the contextual history of writing fiction, satire, or opinion pieces that may look concerning at first but are less so, as this is a common way the student processes and vents. While they may write vague threats and use jarring language, the overall piece is used to express pain and/or is satirical in nature. As the rhetoric concern escalates, the tone and details convey a disregard for the target, and they are written to inflict pain and insult rather than making a larger narrative point. At the extreme, the fiction/satire is seen as a poor disguise, and the real desire is clearly to weaken the target's image and destroy the target.

Sadist
They take pleasure in inflicting harm on people and/or animals. In the early stages, this may manifest as a lack of empathy or non-physical negative attacks on others. In later stages, there is a growing need to harm others physically, along with making plans and narrowing on a target.

Silos
Refers to when information is not shared across departments. Information silos describe a flawed process where information or knowledge is kept separate, tightly controlled, and not shared. When information about a

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threat or potentially threatening situation is not shared appropriately, it can inhibit attempts to assess or manage it.

SOC
Student of concern.

Substantive Threats
Threats that are supported by access to weapons or lethal means and driven more by a desire to harm or destroy a target.

Target Hardening
The process of making a target more difficult to attack using things like a single point of entrance, closed circuit television cameras (CCTV), reinforced doors, automatic locks, and sign in/sign out policies.

Teased
In the early stages, teasing and bullying are an occasional experience that has an impact on a student's self-worth and social connections with others. As teasing increases, their world becomes increasingly unsafe and negative, leading to feelings of hopelessness, despair, being trapped, and eventually feelings of suicide or a desire to send a message to the oppressors through violent action.

Time
This refers to when the attack will take place. In the early stages, the time may be given in months or years with the feeling of "if things don't change at some point, this will happen." As timing escalates, the student thinks in terms of weeks rather than months, and the attack becomes increasingly likely if the target does not change their behavior. At the final stages, the attack is imminent, planned in the next hours or days, and timing may be communicated with a verbal or online threat.

Tone
Whether written or verbal, the tone is intimidating, angry, and frustrated, often with elements of anger, sadness, and pain. As the tone escalates, the attacker uses negative adverbs and adjectives to blame, harass, and intimate the target. Increased objectification of the target occurs, removing any sense of agency or humanity. In extreme stages of tone, rage and a desire for punishment are explicit and unrelenting.

Transient Threats
Threats made as an emotional reaction to a stressful situation in which the person making the threat feels trapped, misunderstood, angry, or unheard.

Types of Workplace Violence
As defined in CA SB 553, there are four types of workplace violence:

1. Violence committed by someone with no legitimate business at the site
2. Violence directed at employees by customers, clients, patients, students, inmates, or visitors
3. Violence directed at an employee by a present or former employee, supervisor, or manager
4. Violence committed by a person who does not work there but has a relationship with an employee

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Vengeance

Seen in parallel with aggrieved, injustice, and grievance collecting, this is the action and desire to punish those they feel have caused their pain or are unfairly enjoying life in a way the attacker resents. Talking and venting eventually includes fantasies of acting out their plan and considering the time, place, and location of their attack.

Violence Risk Assessment

A broad term that may include a threat assessment, psychological assessment, suicide assessment, and/or a general evaluation of overall risk.

Weapons Acquisition

Moving beyond simple interest, they begin to purchase weapons or gain experience shooting at a range. The weapons are increasingly chosen for a specific purpose and the knowledge about the weapons becomes more directly tied to a specific attack plan. Secondary and tertiary weapons, ammunition, and gear are obtained.

Weapons Interest

They explore different types of firearms, knives, explosive devices, and corresponding tactical equipment such as harnesses, night-vision goggles, expanded magazines, optics, and bullet-proof vests. As their interest progresses, they become increasingly obsessed with the topic and talk about this freely with others despite negative consequences to their friendships, work, or academics. They may belong to several Internet discussion groups and in-person organizations and subscribe to magazines or other books or literature. As this interest escalates, there becomes an increasing focus on narrowing weapons and tactical material knowledge for a specific plan, such as a shooting at a public event, school, or workplace.

Zero-Tolerance Policies

These often require a straightforward separation based on a single incident, however, simply separating a subject from school or work under the authority of a zero-tolerance policy creates the potential to take an upset, frustrated individual and escalate them into a rage-filled and potentially vengeful attacker. Instead, according to the FBI, zero-tolerance policies should not require a rigid, one-size-fits-all response, but mean that no threatening or violent behavior is acceptable, and no violent incident will be ignored.

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