

# Module One

## K-12 Case Triage

### Case Details

A student presents as a seven-year-old male with a mother whose employment is unknown and a father who works as a guard at a local prison/jail. The student has one older brother and no other siblings. It is believed there are firearms in the home, and they are not secured or locked. The family lives in an area of town known for being dangerous and with frequent drug trade (mostly methamphetamine).

General behavioral concerns involve a lack of attention during classroom times and the use of profane and threatening language to other students, staff, and teachers. The school also noted attendance issues; however, these have not risen to the point of involving a truancy officer. Recent behaviors involve striking a teacher in the face and threatening other students with statements such as “I will kill you,” “I have a gun and will kill you,” and “I have a knife and will kill you.” Recently, the student brought a knife to school.

#### What are some of the primary risks you see in this case?

There are limited social supports within the home, with both parents working and one older sibling. The family lives in an area of town that also raises concerns related to violence and potential drug sales, and there are unsecured firearms in the home. There are attendance issues, lack of focus when he is in the classroom, threats to other students, hitting the teacher, and direct threats of bringing weapons to school, with him following through on one of the threats by bringing a knife to school.

#### What type of assessment(s) would be best in this scenario (psychological, triage, violence risk, threat assessment)?

The most pressing need is a threat assessment to make a judgement about the likelihood of him bringing other weapons to school and threatening, harming, or killing another student or teacher. A triage assessment is useful to look at the breadth of the issues at hand prior to conducting a fuller violence risk and threat assessment. A psychological assessment may also be useful to address any mental illness issues that may be contributing to the lack of focus in the classroom, impulsive actions with threats, bringing the knife to school, and striking a teacher.

#### Would you characterize the threats as transient or substantive in nature? What questions would you need to ask to help with this appraisal?

The escalation to bringing the knife to school leans the assessment initially toward more of a substantive threat. This demonstrates his follow-through and increases concerns about his potential access to unsecured firearms in the home. It would be helpful to better understand the motivation for him bringing the knife to school, how it was discovered, and if it was being used to threaten other children.

### **Would this case be better understood as an affective or targeted violence motivation?**

The case presents initially as an affective violence case where the student is interacting impulsively with those around him. He is likely reacting to environmental stress, such as teasing, feeling isolated, or even frustration at not getting his way. However, bringing a knife to school appears to fit more in potential targeted violence motivation. Ideally, more information should be gathered around the context of threats made prior to striking the teacher and why he brought the knife in. Other areas to explore include his triggers and the context around his making threats against other students.

### **Would you consider this case behavior as more hunting or howling?**

This depends on the context making the threats, striking the teacher, and bringing the knife to school. The behavior certainly is intimidating to those around him and likely fits more closely with a motivation to intimidate and scare others related to fear, frustration, anger, or revenge. Given that, these may seem like howling behaviors to convey power, a desire for compliance, frustration at rules, or social problems. Hunting behaviors are more hidden and planned in nature. However, as mentioned before, bringing the knife to school is a different behavior from the others, as it likely was something that required forethought and planning (e.g., which knife, how it was hidden on his person, and what he intended to do with it).

### **Using the metaphor example of “touching all the parts of the elephant,” what parts of this case should we include to gain a better context?**

The family system is one that would benefit from some additional questions, particularly related to his relationship with his older brother. There is no information about race or ethnicity shared in the case, and this may be a contributing factor when compared to the school population. The context around striking the teacher and when/where the threats are made would also be important to explore. The nature of the attendance problems would be another area to better understand. A discussion of social service reporting as it relates to the threats made, family safety, and the potential access to unsecured firearms in the household should also be considered.

### **What in-school supports might be useful to explore for this case?**

The exploration of a potential IEP, psychological assessment, and ADA/504 accommodations would be warranted. Afterschool programs, social clubs, sports or organizations, music lessons, and art classes may be other in-school supports that are available. A plan to address behaviors in the school should be created regardless of whether an IEP or 505/ADA accommodations are put into place. While not an immediate action, a discussion of what the school can and cannot support at the current location, potential additions of support staff/aids, and consideration of a more specialized school setting should be considered.

### **What other supports or organizations would you consider involving in this case?**

Programs such as the Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, local recreational sports, martial arts classes, art or music classes, gymnastics, or other social clubs/organizations would help create more structured time and offer the ability to redirect some of his misplaced energy. A referral to his pediatrician for an initial evaluation leading to potential medication referrals, outpatient individual counseling, and family counseling/support should also be explored.

**What additional information would be useful to have to complete an assessment and engage in risk mitigation planning?**

Past behavior that occurred at any previous schools, along with more information about the family dynamics related to supervision and home life, would both be useful. Further contextual information about the nature of the threat would also be useful to better develop successful interventions.

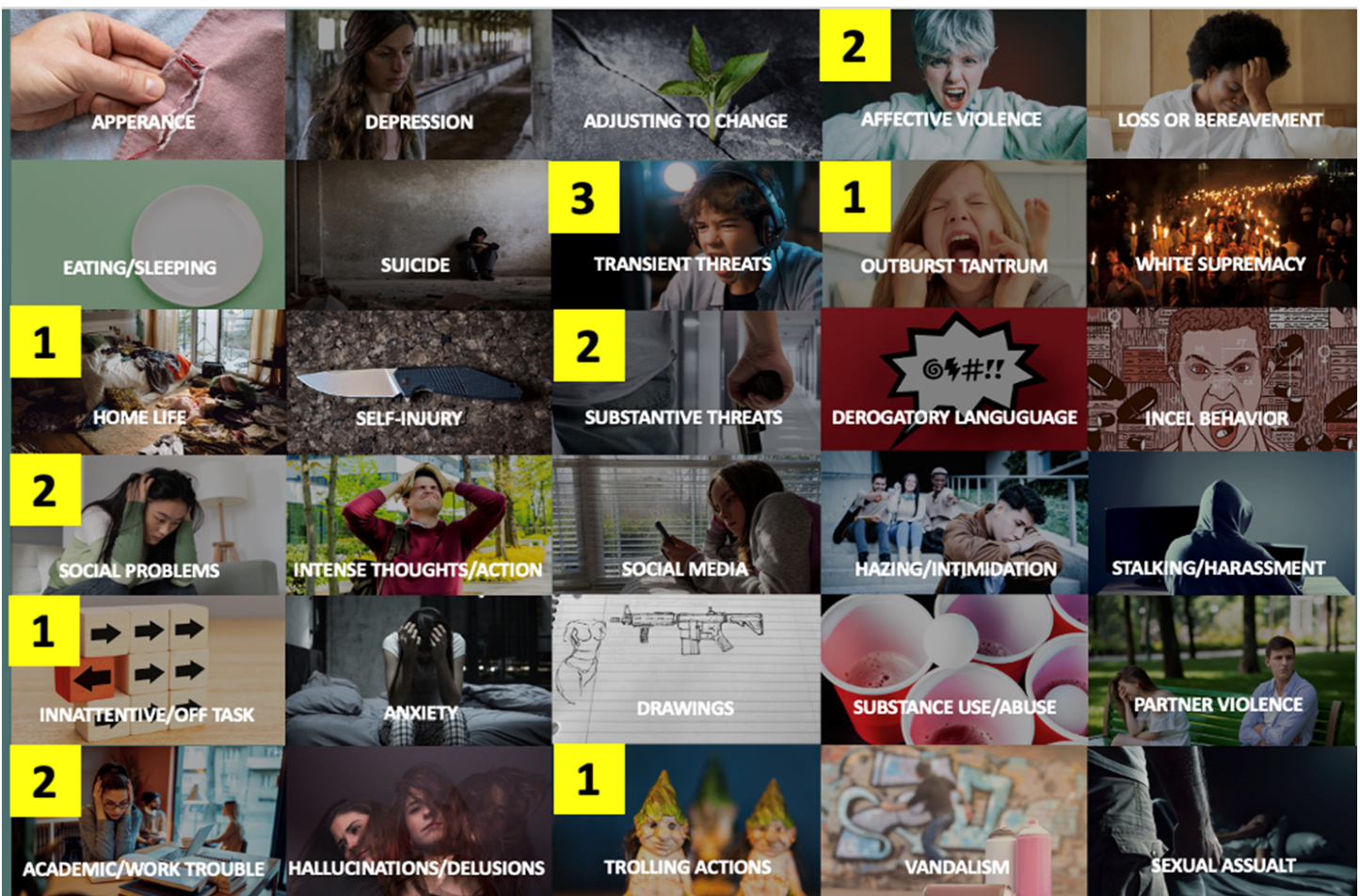
**While you consider risk or escalation factors on one side of the see-saw, what might be some supportive, stabilizing, or protective factors on the other side?**

More would need to be known about the family system. At seven years old, most of the supportive or stabilizing factors are more directly tied to the family. As it stands now, there are multiple strong risk factors and few stabilizing factors in his life (that are known). Exploring his peer connections, the family's financial state, unsupervised times, visitors to the home, and the details and relationship with the older sibling would all be useful areas to explore.

**What general level of risk would you assign to the case (low, moderate, high)?**

This case would be assigned a high level of risk based on the violence toward the teacher, multiple threats to other students, and the escalation of those threats by him bringing the knife into school.

**Pathways Scoring HIGH**



## Pathways Interventions

### Home Life

- Meet with parents/guardians about counseling
- Normalize and offer support and care
- Identify other supports and protective factors

### Social Problems

- Meet with parents/guardians about counseling
- Discuss interruption of academic, social and life skills
- Connect to peer and social supports, inspire hope

### Inattentive/Off Task

- Redirect student; offer ways to regain focus
- Praise appropriate behavior and good attitudes
- Teach active listening, innovative notetaking

### Academic/Work Trouble

- Meet with parents/guardians about counseling
- Offer support, identify, manage concerning behavior
- Develop goals to reduce triggers and increase support

### Transient Threats

- Threat assessment to develop risk and management plan
- Facilitate a meeting with parents/guardians and police
- Use progressive disciplinary policy; consider suspension

### Substantive Threats

- Threat assessment mtg with parents/guardians and police
- Use progressive disciplinary policy; consider suspension
- Consider notification of threatened party

### Trolling Actions

- Identify areas of difficulty (social, academic, etc.)
- Discuss social and discipline implications
- Explore alternative behaviors, supports

### Affective Violence

- Set clear limits, boundaries, and follow up process
- Assess need for discipline, stay-away orders, and limits
- Parental/guardian notification

### Outburst/Tantrum

- Give clear and concise directions
- Praise appropriate behavior and good attitudes
- Provide small, attainable goals

## Summary from Pathways

The school should meet with parents to gain more information about his home life and involve them early in the process. This should involve offering support and normalization of any challenges with a solution-focused approach. Exploring potential family support and gaining a better understanding of the attendance issues would be helpful as well. Once a rapport and connection are established with the family, there should be a discussion of the knife being brought to school and the potential access the student has to firearms in the home. Assessing extended family support may also be useful here.

Given the high score, a full violence risk assessment (including a more detailed threat assessment) should occur to better understand the potential for actionability and lethality related to threats. The assessor should identify areas of difficulty with his daily school day (early morning, transitional periods, unstructured times like recess or lunch, or end of day). Discussing potential positive social connections and interests would be useful to determine stabilizing and protective factors.

There should be a discussion of psychological testing to determine if an IEP/504/ADA plan would be helpful in addressing these behaviors. This should occur in parallel with a pediatrician appointment with potential referrals for additional testing and/or medication. Discussion of alternative choices he can make when frustrated to build better impulse control should occur either as part of a school plan or counseling.

A progressive discipline policy, which may include police and criminal charges, should be used. Clear boundaries and disciplinary policies should be in effect. A process should be put into place where the student checks in when they get to school, and some type of search occurs for potential weapons.

Finally, a discussion of how the school notifies other students and families related to the threats that occurred and how the school managed threatening behavior is essential. This would include identifying any specific notifications that need to be made to targets of his threats.