

# The R-Model

**Ready • Respond • Refer • Revisit**  
**K-12 School Crisis Response Teams**

# The R-Model

## Ready - Respond - Refer – Revisit K-12 School Crisis Response Teams

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# The Violence Project

The Violence Project is a nonprofit (501c3), nonpartisan, research center dedicated to reducing violence in society by using data and analysis to improve policy and practice. We conduct high-quality, high-impact research for public consumption. We also develop and deliver education and training to share research findings and prevent violence. Our research on mass shootings, funded by the [U.S. Department of Justice](#), has received global media attention.

Our co-founders, **Dr. Jillian Peterson**, a psychologist and professor of criminology and criminal justice at Hamline University, and **Dr. James Densley**, a sociologist and professor of criminal justice at Metropolitan State University, have developed both a common language for understanding violence and a holistic approach to addressing it. The Violence Project's areas of expertise include gun violence, violent extremism, cyber violence, street gangs and youth violence, trauma and mental illness, suicide prevention, crisis intervention, de-escalation, and police reform.

## Off-Ramp

[The Off-Ramp Project](#), one of the arms of TVP, is a hub of information, training, and resources focused on preventing all forms of violence, and specifically mass shootings. Off-Ramp translates findings from [the mass shooter database](#) into tangible, evidence-based, accessible strategies and skills to prevent future violence. Off-Ramp has three components: training, resources, and policy. Our online or in-person training certification courses focus on providing skills in building relationships, crisis intervention, de-escalation, suicide prevention, threat assessment, and social media safety to K-12 teachers and staff, administrators, social workers, law enforcement and security, human resource professionals, and parents. Off-Ramp's resource page is a one-stop centralized list of resources for individuals in crisis or for individuals worried that someone they know is on the path toward violence. Off-Ramp's public policy platform will provide data-driven policy briefs for local, state, and national policy makers focused on tangible policies that will effectively reduce mass violence.

## Overview

The R-Model is a violence prevention protocol for K-12 schools using Crisis Response Teams (teams). Using this model, schools get **ready** by setting up a team and protocols, **respond** to students in crisis, **refer** students to support and resources, and **revisit** to continually check in with that student. The R-Model was originally developed as a law enforcement protocol and has since been adapted into a school-based crisis intervention and violence prevention model (Peterson, Densley, & Erickson, 2019).

A crisis is a period of time where someone's current circumstances overwhelms their ability to cope. Someone in crisis is like a balloon full to burst and ready to pop. They are in need of compassion, support, and resources to let some air out of the balloon. If not addressed, a crisis can escalate, and the balloon can pop – resulting in harm or violence toward self or others. A crisis is communicated with a noticeable **change in behavior from baseline or "normal."** This will look different for each student. School community members (teachers, administrators, coaches, tutors, bus drivers, etc.) see their students every day. They are on the front lines of observing students' behaviors over time and are well positioned to notice any marked change that may indicate that someone is in crisis.

In the R-Model, the first goal is to de-escalate and safeguard a student in crisis, then to create an Individualized Plan of Support (IPS) to connect them to the resources and services they need. In this model, punitive measures that may contribute to or exacerbate the crisis like school exclusion or criminal charges are avoided unless absolutely necessary.

The goal of the team is to prevent violence toward self and/or others and promote student well-being and safety. It is rooted in prior work on behavioral threat assessment (the process of evaluating whether someone may engage in targeted violence) and new research by The Violence Project on the causes and correlates of school shootings. This protocol offers a new way of thinking about behavioral threat assessment. Sometimes, behavior that is concerning is not inherently *threatening*. Based on what we know about school violence, it is critical to investigate any signs of a crisis, not only threats of violence.

The R-Model redefines school safety, as follows:

THE OLD MODELS	THE R-MODEL
Students reported to the team will be disciplined and punished.	Students reported to the team will receive holistic, compassionate, and appropriate supports and services.
Students reported to the team will be labeled a (potential) school shooter or “troubled kid.”	The team investigates and <i>supports</i> students who are in crisis. The team connects students with best fit services. It is <i>not</i> a label maker.
Only direct threats of violence or acts of violence should be reported to the team.	Any signs of a crisis should be reported to the team. A crisis is a marked <i>change</i> in behavior. This change will look different for each student.
Anyone reporting to the team is a “snitch” and will be seen as unable to handle a student’s behavior.	Anyone reporting to the team will be seen as <i>caring</i> about a student and <i>concerned</i> about their overall well-being.
A report to the team will become a part of the student’s permanent record.	Only information that is necessary to support a student’s safety and wellbeing will be shared in accordance with The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
Reporting a student to the team will automatically initiate a law enforcement response.	Law enforcement will be involved if the report involves a direct threat of imminent violence toward self or others. However, reporting will initiate a team assessment to determine the appropriate response. Properly trained law enforcement may serve on the team as a community support member.

The R-Model includes 4 Steps, which are covered in detail in subsequent sections.



## 1. READY - Building a crisis response team

1. Promote a safe school climate
2. Establish a Crisis Response Team
3. Identify resources
4. Define concerning behaviors that need reporting to the team
5. Create a central reporting mechanism
6. Determine criteria for intervention
7. Train all stakeholders
8. Plan communication strategies



## **2. RESPOND - Effectively managing a crisis**

1. Establish assessment procedures
2. Conduct interviews with the person in crisis and the reporter
3. Involve law enforcement if appropriate
4. Conduct additional fact-finding interviews and gather records
5. Evaluate crisis in context of social/emotional development
6. Develop risk management options



## **3. REFER - Determine the level and type of intervention necessary**

1. Choose the best course of action based on the seriousness of the crisis, the students' level of risk, and their individual needs
2. Create an Individualized Plan of Support (IPS) in writing, describing the action to be taken, and how and when the team will follow-up to check in with the student and their parents
3. Avoid punitive responses that may exacerbate the crisis and/or any grievance. Concerning behaviors can have a variety of resolutions



## **4. REVISIT - Consistent follow-up to assess progress and process**

1. Meet regularly to review case plans completed on previous assessments
2. Determine if a student's progress has been successful enough to discontinue the IPS
3. Revise or revisit the IPS if needed to ensure student success

# A Brief History of Behavioral Threat Assessment

Behavioral threat assessment is designed to evaluate whether someone may engage in *targeted* violence, rather than other forms of violence. It is a deductive process focused primarily on a person's behavior and communications rather than on characteristics, and what they tell us about that person's potential to do harm. A precursor to modern behavioral threat assessment, called the protective intelligence model, was first developed by the U.S. Secret Service after several high-profile attacks on public officials and public figures. The protective intelligence model was later adapted for other sectors—namely, workplaces, K-12 schools, and colleges and universities—in many cases following high-profile attacks at these locations. For example, it was in the wake of several U.S. post office shootings in the 1980s and early 1990s that the U.S. Postal Service implemented a workplace threat assessment program, using district-level threat assessment teams, as part of its broader workplace violence prevention initiative.

The federal school threat assessment model followed several high-profile school shootings in the 1990s, including the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, which killed 12 students and one teacher. The Columbine Review Commission made specific recommendations regarding the detection of threats made to the school environment and advised schools to assemble threat assessment teams composed of counselors, principals, school psychologists and law enforcement personnel. The Commission recommended the team complete training on conducting a threat assessment, suicide prevention, and laws regarding confidentiality (e.g., FERPA). They also recognized a reluctance to report threats to administrators and police. Either students did not want to be seen as a “snitch” or adults did not see threats made by children as viable.

After the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007, which killed 32 people, campus safety and security also became a major focus. It is now recommended that workplaces, schools, colleges and universities establish threat assessment teams or similar multidisciplinary teams in an effort to prevent violence.

The Violence Project's research indicates that a threat, or leakage, of potential violence is a critical intervention point, but a modified approach to the traditional threat assessment concept is needed because the term “threat assessment” is too narrow and can be taken too literally. Instead, we need to focus on all warning signs that a student may be in crisis and intervene accordingly.



# Key Findings about School Mass Shootings

These key findings came out of The Violence Project's database of 134 attempted and completed mass shootings from 1980-2020 (see Peterson, Densley, & Erickson, 2021):

1. Perpetrators are almost always insiders, not outsiders – they are current and former students of the school;
2. Perpetrators are often in crisis prior to their attack, indicated by a noticeable change in behavior;
3. Many perpetrators communicate or “leak” their plans in advance, typically to their peers;
4. Perpetrators often are suicidal prior to their attacks and intend to die during their crimes;
5. Many perpetrators have a history of early childhood trauma (i.e., Adverse Childhood Experiences);
6. Many perpetrators have a history of mental health concerns;
7. Perpetrators tend to study previous perpetrators, most notably the Columbine shooters;
8. Perpetrators may seek validation for their actions and become radicalized in online groups;
9. Most perpetrators use firearms that they obtain from their family members (gifted, borrowed, or stolen).

Based on these key findings, it has been determined that school mass shootings are preventable.

# Ready: Building a Crisis Response Team

Building a Crisis Response Team (team) will look different for each school depending on the size of the school, the resources available, the community characteristics, and the needs of the students. The steps below are meant to help guide schools through the team formation process. They are informed by the US Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center's (NTAC, 2018) *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence*. In consultation with NTAC, we reordered, modified, and expanded their recommendations to reflect new findings from The Violence Project's research.

The following 8 Steps to Building a Crisis Response Team are outlined sequentially in detail below:

- 1** Promote a safe school climate
- 2** Establish a Crisis Response Team
- 3** Identify resources
- 4** Define concerning behaviors that need reporting to the team
- 5** Create a central reporting mechanism
- 6** Determine criteria for intervention
- 7** Train all stakeholders
- 8** Plan communication strategies

## step 1

### PROMOTE A SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Positive relationships make it more likely that students will report worrying or threatening behavior and/or communication to the team. Positive relationships also make it more likely that school personnel will notice a marked change in a student's behavior and signs that they are in crisis. A positive school culture and climate, which provides time and space for teachers and staff to connect one-on-one with students in school to establish relationships is critical for crisis intervention.

- ▶ Develop a positive school climate built on a culture of safety, respect, trust, and social/emotional support.
- ▶ Students should feel empowered to share their concerns with adults.
- ▶ Encourage staff to create positive, trusting relationships with students. Every student should have at least one trusted adult in the building.
- ▶ Break down "codes of silence," so students know that by reporting behavior they are helping their peers rather than punishing them.
- ▶ Develop programs that help students feel more connected to their peers and their school.
- ▶ Encourage students to take part in teams/clubs based on their identity and interests.
- ▶ Actively engage students in helping to sustain safe school climates.

#### Helpful Resources

- [Office of Elementary and Secondary Education – School Climate](#)
- [Penn State Issue Brief – School Climate and Social Emotional Learning](#)
- [Harvard Graduate School of Education – Making Caring Common](#)
- [Search Institute – Developmental Relationships](#)
- [Common Sense Education – Building Peer Relationships](#)
- [American Psychological Association – School Connectedness](#)
- [National Center of Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#)
- [American Institute for Research – Creating Safe, Equitable, Engaging Schools](#)

## step 2

### ESTABLISH A CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

*(Use fillable forms to guide this process)*

- ▶ Each school district should have a team and each school within the district should have a team. The district-wide team can help support more complex cases and provide a more objective assessment. They can be consulted on an ad hoc basis.
- ▶ Crisis Response Teams should include personnel from a variety of disciplines within the school community. People to consider: Principal, counselor, nurse, teachers, staff, school resource officer, law enforcement, community mental health provider, IT specialist, parent representative.
- ▶ The team should have a specifically designated leader, with at least two people to serve as backup leaders in case of an absence or emergency.
- ▶ The team should meet on a regular basis and on a set schedule that is posted publicly. Weekly or bi-weekly meetings are recommended, based on school and/or district size. The team should also have a mechanism to call an emergency meeting if a situation is brought to their attention that has to be dealt with immediately. Weekly meetings can address concerns about students in crisis, as well as follow-up on previous cases or other professional development activities. Answer the following:
  - When will the team meet - how often and under what circumstances??
  - Where will the team meet - virtually, in person, or both?
  - How will the team communicate with each other?
- ▶ The team should establish protocols and procedures that are followed for each assessment, including who will interview the student of concern; who will talk to classmates, teachers, or parents; and who will document the team's efforts.

## step 3

### IDENTIFY RESOURCES

*(Use fillable forms to guide this process)*

- ▶ The team should identify what resources and services are available, both within the school and in the community, for students who are in crisis and in need of support. Resources should be identified in each of the following areas:
  - Mental health – counseling, inpatient, and outpatient treatment
  - Substance abuse treatment
  - Social services
  - Housing
  - Education (special education, alternative education)
  - Employment and training
  - Community crisis teams
  - Peer support
  - Parent and family resources
  - Juvenile court representatives

The team should also reach out to local law enforcement to make a connection and establish a working relationship.

- ▶ For each resource, someone on the team should establish contact, introduce the team and its purpose, and gather the following information:
  - Who is the point of contact?
  - Exactly what services are provided?
  - Are they taking new clients or patients? Is there a wait list?
  - Is there a fee associated with the service? Do they take insurance?
  - How are referrals made? Who should the team connect with?
  - What is their location and hours? Do they have emergency appointments?
  - Are they willing to be a community partner by sending staff to team meetings if needed?

## step 4

### DEFINE CONCERNING BEHAVIORS THAT NEED REPORTING TO THE CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

A crisis will look different for each person. For some students, signs of a crisis may be loud and disruptive, while for others, signs of a crisis may look quiet and withdrawn. Signs of a crisis are a **noticeable change in behavior from baseline or “normal.”** Behaviors are on a continuum and may or may not be an immediate concern for physical violence. Schools should err on the side of caution, encouraging school community members to report any students they are concerned about.

We recommend using the guide below to identify disruptive, distressed, dysregulated, or dangerous behaviors. This is not a complete list of signs to look for, but offers some initial guidance. In each area, concern would be related to a *marked change* (i.e., something noticeable that feels different) from their usual behavior.

- ▶ **Disruptive:** Behaviors that interfere with the environment.
  - Unruly or abrasive behavior
  - Low tolerance for frustration
  - Unusually argumentative
  
- ▶ **Distressed:** Behaviors that cause concern for the person’s well-being.
  - Changes in performance, appearance, or behavior
  - Unusual or exaggerated emotional response
  - Signs of hopelessness, despair, or suicidality
  
- ▶ **Dysregulated:** Behaviors that cause others to feel uncomfortable or scared.
  - Withdrawn, isolated, depressed mood
  - Agitation, inability to complete daily tasks
  - Suspicious or paranoid thoughts
  - Writing or drawing with unusual or concerning themes
  
- ▶ **Dangerous:** Behaviors that threaten safety or well-being.
  - Harassment, stalking, intimidation
  - Increased interest in violence or weapons
  - Threats of harm against self or others
  - Planning or rehearsing violence

Specific threats of harm against self or others should be handled by the team immediately, rather than waiting until the next scheduled meeting.

## step 5

### CREATE A CENTRAL REPORTING MECHANISM

- ▶ The team should establish one or more reporting mechanisms for concerns or “tips.” This could be a smartphone app, an email address, a Google form, or a number to text or call.
- ▶ The team should train students, teachers, staff, school resource officers, parents and other school community members on recognizing signs of a crisis, their roles and responsibilities in reporting the behavior, and how to report it.
- ▶ Emphasize that reporting a concern will result in care and support for the student at risk, not punishment or criminal charges. Intervention will be holistic and appropriate.
- ▶ The team should proactively monitor all incoming reports and respond immediately when someone’s safety is concerned. Ideally reporting would be monitored by two to three people on the team to ensure a timely response, or at the state level by a designated crisis center.
- ▶ An anonymous reporting option is recommended because students and school community members are more likely to report concerning or threatening information without fear of retribution.
- ▶ The school community should feel confident that the team will be responsive to concerns, reports will be acted upon, kept confidential, and handled appropriately.

## step 6

### DETERMINE CRITERIA FOR INTERVENTION

- ▶ Each crisis is a unique and fluid situation. Small signs of a crisis for a student may signal significant concern. Each student in crisis should be individually assessed to determine their individual risk and needs.
- ▶ Reports regarding weapons, threats/acts of violence, and immediate safety concerns should be reported to law enforcement.
- ▶ Schools should establish criteria for times and situations when law enforcement will be asked to support or take over an assessment. Schools should also have a plan to follow-up with a student after law enforcement's role is complete.
- ▶ Schools should establish criteria for times or situations when community resources should be utilized, including social services, school services, and referral to outpatient mental health care.



## step 7

### TRAIN ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Data indicates that all stakeholders should have training in recognizing and responding to a crisis, suicide prevention, and how and when to report to the team. All members of the school community should be trained including:

- ▶ Faculty, staff, and administrators
- ▶ Students
- ▶ Parents/guardians and families
- ▶ Law enforcement
- ▶ Community mental health providers
- ▶ Community stakeholders (health and human services, juvenile services etc.)
- ▶ Volunteers
- ▶ Bus drives, coaches, club leaders, tutors – anyone who works with the school's students

## step 8

### PLAN COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- ▶ The team should communicate their approach to the entire school community, including all parents and students. The school community should know when team meetings take place and be made aware of the 4-step R-model process, the types of changes in behavior that need reporting to the team, and the team's general approach to investigating students in crisis and providing resources. Information and education sessions are encouraged. The team may also distribute a one-page handout describing the process and place a link to more information on the school and/or district's website.
- ▶ Develop a communications plan to notify the school community if there is a threat of violence. Consider how much information can and should be communicated while still protecting the privacy and confidentiality of any individuals involved.
- ▶ Develop a plan of when and how to notify potential victims or targets of threatening language and/or behavior. Victims or targets should be notified within 12 hours of the reported threat, and offered appropriate resources including mental health resources, peer support, administrative support, or law enforcement support.
- ▶ When the team is uncertain how to proceed in a situation, they are encouraged to consult with nearby schools, local law enforcement, or the local Office of School Safety. Any consultation with outside resources should be documented.

## Respond: Effectively Managing A Crisis

1. Once a report or “tip” comes in, meet as a team and determine who will conduct the initial assessment.
2. Establish the assessment procedures:
  - a. Use a community systems approach. Identify sources that may have information on the student’s actions and circumstances.
  - b. Determine who will take the lead on the assessment and track any and all information gathered. The date and time of each action should be documented using the accompanying forms.
3. If possible, interview the reporting person to assess their perception of risk level, using appropriate documentation.
4. If possible, interview the student in crisis to assess their risk level, using appropriate documentation. Build rapport that can facilitate information-gathering efforts. Use crisis intervention and de-escalation strategies including empathy, compassion, and active listening. In preparation for that interview, consider the following:
  - a. Who has a previous relationship with this student?
  - b. How and when will that person reach out?
  - c. What did the student mean by their comments or actions?
  - d. How is the student doing? What is going on in their lives?
  - e. Is this student in danger of hurting themselves?
  - f. Is this student in danger of hurting others?
  - g. What resources does the student need?
  - h. How quickly do they need them?
  - i. Who else should be contacted about this?
5. If a student poses a high risk to self or others and immediate action is required to prevent serious injury or death, contact local law enforcement and postpone the assessment process until the situation is safe.
6. If appropriate, contact the student’s parents/guardian(s), documenting who made contact, who was spoken to, and the time contact occurred. Parents/guardian(s) may be invited to meet with the team.
7. If appropriate, contact additional fact-finding interviews to learn more about the student in crisis. Potential interviewees include peers, teachers, and other school community members who know or work with the distressed student. Interviews can be performed in person, or a secure email form can be sent with a specific deadline for completion.

- 8.** If needed and if able, gather additional records from within and without the school:
  - Review academic, disciplinary, medical, social services, law enforcement, and other formal records that may be related to the student.
  - Examine online social media pages and review class assignments.
  
- 9.** Evaluate the student's concerning behaviors and communications in the context of their age and social/emotional development. The following themes should be explored when appropriate:
  - Concerning, unusual, or threatening communications;
  - Inappropriate interest in weapons, school shooters, mass attacks, or other types of violence;
  - Access to weapons within their home;
  - Stressful events, such as setbacks, challenges, or losses;
  - Impact of emotional or developmental issues;
  - Evidence of desperation, hopelessness, or suicidal thoughts/gestures;
  - Protective factors such as positive or prosocial influences or events;
  - Previous traumatic events;
  - Mental health history, treatment, and current symptoms;
  - Family situation and family support;
  - Time spent in online chat or social media groups that validate or promote violence.

Note, interviews can be conducted in any order based on the individual and situation.

**10.** Develop risk management options:

- Teams should develop crisis intervention and risk management strategies that reduce the student's risk for engaging in harm against self or others.
  - What resources will be utilized?
  - How will the person be connected to the resources?
  - When will the next follow-up conversation be?
  - Who will do the follow-up?
  - Do they know where to reach out in case of emergency?
  
- The team may determine that the student is not at risk at the moment, but may need monitoring or is in need of guidance/services. Still, each student who is assessed will require an Individualized Plan of Support (see Refer below).

- 11.** If there is another student or students who are the victims of the threats of violence, the team should reach out and engage with them as well. Appropriate support and safety protocols should be put in place to ensure their feeling of safety and comfort in school.



## Refer: Determine the level and type of intervention necessary

After the assessment, the team will determine the best course of action based on the seriousness of the crisis, the students' level of risk, and their individual needs. The team will create an Individualized Plan of Support (IPS) in writing, describing the action to be taken, and how and when the team will follow-up and check in with the student and their parents. The IPS should stay in effect until the team is no longer concerned about the student in crisis. The IPS may even follow the student to another school (see Record Keeping and Information Sharing below).

Punitive responses should be avoided because they may exacerbate the crisis and/or any grievance with the school and, in turn, increase the risk of harming self or others. Removing a student from school (suspension/expulsion) does not eliminate risk of violence at the school. In fact, suspensions and/or expulsions can cause a student in crisis to escalate quickly. Still, asking the student's family to remove drugs and alcohol and implement safe storage of firearms, or asking law enforcement to block the student's access to weapons is a good practice.

The team should consider the safety of all stakeholders, including the student in crisis while the IPS is developed. The aim is to remove or redirect the student's motive (e.g., bullying prevention efforts, counseling, mediation, restorative practices) and reduce the effect of stressors by providing resources and support.

Concerning behaviors can have a variety of resolutions, for example:

- ▶ Referral for/to:
  - Counseling
  - Student support services
  - Social services
  - Community services
- ▶ Mediation
- ▶ Restorative practices
- ▶ A plan for regular check-ins with school staff
- ▶ Mentoring (adult or peer)
- ▶ Removal or safe storage of firearms in the home
- ▶ Removal of prescription drugs and/or alcohol from the home
- ▶ Code of Conduct violations/school discipline
- ▶ Law enforcement resolution for criminal behavior
- ▶ Emergency detention for mental health crisis

This is not a complete list and will be dependent on the resources available to the school.



## **Revisit: Consistent Follow-up to Assess Progress and Process**

At regular team meetings, the team should review case plans completed on previous assessments. During those meetings, reports should be given to the team regarding the students' compliance and progress. The team may also decide that the student's progress has been successful enough to discontinue the IPS. It is the responsibility of the team leader to make sure all of the assigned tasks in the IPS are being completed successfully.

The team must follow-up with a student to check their progress with their IPS, as well as follow-up with their teachers and parents to check on their ongoing well-being. If needed, the IPS should be revisited or revised to ensure student success. The frequency of follow-up contact should be determined by the seriousness of the original crisis and the extent of progress since.

## Consent and Mandated Reporting

It should be noted that the completion of a crisis assessment does not excuse a school from following all Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or Americans with Disabilities Act requirements for students with disabilities. Instead, the crisis assessment process should be completed concurrent to any Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or Americans with Disabilities Act required process, to determine if the child's needs are being met by their current services.

Any person employed by a school or within the field of education is a mandated reporter and must report allegations of maltreatment. Maltreatment includes physical abuse, neglect, mental injury and sexual abuse. If you have reason to suspect a student has been abused or neglected, you should file a report to your state's Department of Education student maltreatment program within 24 hours. Nothing in this protocol changes this requirement.

When investigating a safety issue, schools do not need consent from parents to interview their child. Some parents may refuse the school permission to complete the assessment, to speak to administration, or allow access to their child. It is certainly their right to refuse, but (depending on the seriousness of the crisis behavior) could significantly increase the associated risk level.

Although the law gives schools, law enforcement, and child welfare professionals the ability to interview a child without parental consent, it is considered best practice to have the consent and cooperation of the parents. **A positive and communicative relationship with the parents can be a mitigating factor and make a child's reintegration back into the school community after a significant incident easier to manage.**

## Record Keeping and Information Sharing

There are many legal and ethical issues related to the creation, storage, access, sharing, and destruction of records. Please obtain guidance from legal counsel to ensure compliance with federal and state laws and local policies and procedures.

Ideally, team records **should** be stored in a separate, secure file or database that only members of the team have access to. A centralized database of everyone who has come to the team's attention is recommended, but need not be complicated—a simple spreadsheet (one that can be searched for names, terms, etc.) will suffice.

Full team records **should not** be stored in a student's cumulative file, discipline file, school counseling record, or school psychologist record. Instead, just reference team involvement and provide a point of contact for further information.

Should a student transfer to another school district, there is no legal requirement to prevent the receiving school district from viewing these records. In particular, if a student transfers to another school or district to avoid expulsion, it does not mean that this student no longer poses a danger to self or others. Information regarding the student's concerning behavior and actions taken to mitigate such behaviors should be shared with the receiving school district as soon as possible.

Crisis Response Team records can be sent to other schools in the district, state, out-of-state, or even to colleges. However, we recommended that prior to sending them to another school, etc., the team members from school A and school B talk to decide if the records are needed and what information would be most helpful. This is important because misunderstanding or misinformation can result if team records are shared without any discussion or explanation. Further, if full records are sent as part of a general records transfer, you do not know who will see them or how they will be used or interpreted. This is information that should only be discussed and shared between team members.

One of the most important recommendations made by the Columbine Review Commission was in regard to information sharing. In the past, schools and law enforcement did not commonly share information about students due to concerns about federal regulations or confidentiality. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act already provides some guidance as to when schools can share student information with law enforcement.

FERPA 34 CFR 99.36 informs us of what conditions apply to disclosure of information in health and safety emergencies:

- (a)** An educational agency or institution may disclose personally identifiable information from an education record to appropriate parties, including parents of an eligible student, in connection with an emergency if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals.
- (b)** Nothing in this Act or this part shall prevent an educational agency or institution from—
  - (1)** Including in the education records of a student appropriate information concerning disciplinary action taken against the student for conduct that posed a significant risk to the safety or well-being of that student, other students, or other members of the school community;



(2) Disclosing appropriate information maintained under paragraph (b)(1) of this section to teachers and school officials within the agency or institution who the agency or institution has determined have legitimate educational interests in the behavior of the student; or

(3) Disclosing appropriate information maintained under paragraph (b)(1) of this section to teachers and school officials in other schools who have been determined to have legitimate educational interests in the behavior of the student.

(c) In making a determination under paragraph (a) of this section, an educational agency or institution may take into account the totality of the circumstances pertaining to a threat to the health or safety of a student or other individuals. If the educational agency or institution determines that there is an articulable and significant threat to the health or safety of a student or other individuals, it may disclose information from education records to any person whose knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals. If, based on the information available at the time of the determination, there is a rational basis for the determination, the Department will not substitute its judgment for that of the educational agency or institution in evaluating the circumstances and making its determination.

Schools can disclose information that is considered “directory” information without consent. According to FERPA directory information includes a student’s name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance.

According to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), schools must have consent to release student records. Records may be released in certain circumstances without the consent of parents or students. One of those circumstances is to, “appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies.” Another circumstance where the disclosure of student information is allowed without consent is under FERPA 34 CFR 99.31 “State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.”

FERPA **does not apply** to several communications regarding students. Information reported about a student to school staff by another student, either verbally or in writing, is not protected under FERPA. Personal observations of a student or their behavior by school staff are not protected under FERPA. Social media posts made by a student and discovered by school personnel are not protected under FERPA.

This information is specifically cited on the US Department of Education, Family Policy Compliance Office website, here: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>

## Relevant Sources and Reports

The United States Department of Education and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have affirmed the recommendation for multi-disciplinary school based threat assessment teams in the following documents:

- [Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence](#)
- [Threat assessment in schools: A guide to managing threatening situations and to creating safe school climates](#)
- [The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective](#)
- [The final report of the safe school initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States](#)

In developing this protocol, we also consulted the following:

- [COPS Ten Essential Actions to Improve School Safety: School Safety Group Reporting to the Attorney General](#)
- [NTAC Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Target School Violence](#)
- [Overview of the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines \(CSTAG\)](#)
- [Salem Keizer Model of Student Threat Assessment](#)
- [REMS T.A. Guide for Developing a High Quality School Emergency Operation Plan](#)
- [MN School Safety Center Minnesota Comprehensive School Safety Guide](#)
- [MN School Safety Report: School Safety Lessons Learned](#)

## Additional data on Perpetrators of School Shootings

Any firearm discharge on a K-12 school campus qualifies as a school shooting. And by this measure, there are hundreds of school shootings every year.<sup>1</sup> The Violence Project's School Mass Shooting Database focuses on 134 incidents of completed or attempted mass shootings since 1980. These are shootings where the perpetrator came to the school heavily armed with the intention of shooting indiscriminately at multiple people.

The number of people killed in these events ranges from 0 to 27, with an average of one. Half the time, no one was killed, 21% of the time one person was killed, and three or more people were killed 15% of the time. The number of people injured in school mass shootings ranges from 0-32, with an average of three.

The data indicate that K-12 school mass shootings were most likely to occur first thing in the morning. The most common date for violence to occur was the 20th of the month, which appears to be in reference to the Columbine High School massacre on April 20, 1999. However, the most common months for school mass shootings were at the beginning of the school year (September and October), after winter break (January and February), and before the school year ends in May.

Perpetrators ranged in age from 10 to 53, however very few were over the age of 21. The vast majority were between the ages of 14 and 18, with 15 and 16 being the most common ages. Seventy percent of the perpetrators were *current* students of the school, and 15% were *former* students, meaning 85% of the time, perpetrators were the school's children.

Perpetrators were predominantly white (76%) males (98%) and nearly half of the time they were specifically targeting at least one person at the school. Perpetrators of school mass shootings have a disciplinary record about half the time, 42% have a violent history, and 36% have a criminal record. Of perpetrators with enough available information, 56% had been bullied and 62% showed some signs of mental illness (but did not have a formal diagnosis). Around 40% of perpetrators leaked their plans ahead of time — most often in person to a classmate or a friend. This often took the form of a threat of general violence, like an assault, not specific plans to perpetrate a school shooting.

Forty percent of school mass shootings were highly planned, meaning the shooter conducted intensive surveillance, followed by detailed planning like drawing schematics. These shootings looked different than the others - significantly more people were killed and injured in highly planned shootings and the shooter brought more weapons to the scene. There have been more of these highly planned shootings in recent years. These shootings were most likely to occur at a suburban (60%) high school and to be committed by a current student (80%, 15% former student). Highly planned perpetrators were more likely to leak their plans ahead of time (60%) and be interested in other mass shootings (53% of the time), mostly Columbine. They were also more likely to leave something behind to be found, like a note or "manifesto", and have an element of performance in their shooting, like a costume or a video.

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<sup>2</sup> See the Center for Homeland Defense and Security K-12 School Shooting Database: <https://www.chds.us/ssdb/>

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