Seminar in Preventive Psychological Intervention
Youth Violence Intervention

Youth Violence Intervention

EDS 246b
Preventive Psychological Intervention
Stephen E. Brock, Ph.D., NCSP

Seminar Outline

- Questions
- Preface: Duty to Warn
- My Model of Risk Assessment
- Secret Service Threat Assessment Model
- Responding to "At-Risk" Youth
- Responding to "High-Risk" Youth
- Additional Resources

Preface

- When a student is a danger to self or others, there is a duty to warn.
  – Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California
**Risk Assessment**

- Principles to avoid misuse of risk assessment for violence.
  - Do no harm (keep information confidential and use signs to identify the need for interventions, rather than as a punishment tool).
  - Understand that many students show multiple signs and it is important not to overreact.
  - Avoid stereotypes and labeling.
    - Appearances should direct attention not action
    - View student behavior within a developmental context.
      - Developmentally typical behavior should not be misinterpreted

Adapted from Dwyer, Osher, & Warger (1998)

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**Youth Violence: The River Analogy**

Risk factors that lead to youth violence

Warning signs of youth with the potential for violence

Consequences of violence

Prevention efforts

Intervention efforts

Acts of violence

Postvention efforts

Adapted from Ramsay, Tannen, Tannay & Lang (1996)

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**Risk Assessment:**

Factors that MAY INDICATE youth violence.

- **Stressors** (risk factors)
  - Significant losses
  - Significant disappointments
  - Having been bullied
  - Associated coping failure

- **Symptoms** (warning signs)
  - Suicidal ideation and behaviors
  - Gun use
  - Interest in violence
  - Hopelessness and despair
  - A need for revenge

- These factors MAY signal that a youth has thoughts of violence

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**Risk Assessment:**

**Warning signs that suggest high risk.**

- Serious physical fighting with peers or family members
- Severe destruction of property
- Severe rage for seemingly minor reasons
- Detailed threats of lethal violence
- Possession and/or use of firearms and other weapons
- Other self-injurious behaviors or threats of suicide

**Risk Assessment:**

**Factors that PREDICT youth violence.**

- How close is the student to the brink of the fall?
- Current Plan (the greater the planning the greater the concern)
  - How?
  - How Soon?
  - How Prepared?
- Prior Behavior (breaks down social norms against violence)
  - The best predictor of prior behavior is future behavior.
  - A personal history of act of aggressive violence
  - Personal identification with others who are violent
- Resources
  - Lack of connectedness to pro-social role models (especially adults)

**Referral**

- In addition to training staff and students about risk factors, warning signs, and predictors of violence, a procedure should be developed for students, staff, and parents to refer troubled individuals.
- Once referred, the procedure must include provisions for risk assessment to determine the degree of risk.
  - The procedure should designate a team to conduct risk assessments.
  - A collaborative effort between site administration and school mental health professionals is recommended.
  - If a moderate to serious risk of other-directed violence is suspected, law enforcement should be included in the evaluation and subsequent investigation.
Risk Assessment: Consequences of violence.

- Death and/or Injury
  - May signal the need for school crisis intervention

Secret Service Threat-Assessment Model

- This approach focuses on the facts of a specific case, examines the progression of ideas and planning behavior over time, & corroborates information through multiple sources.
- It is based on three guiding principles.
  1. There is no single type of perpetrator.
     - Instead, targeted violence is perceived as the interaction of perpetrator, setting, situation, and the target.
  2. There is a distinction between posing a threat and making a threat.
     - Many individuals who pose a threat will not make a threat before the attack.
     - Conversely, many individuals who make a threat may pose no harm.
  3. Targeted violence is often a product of an understandable and often discernable pattern of behavior and thinking.
     - It is not random or spontaneous.

Secret Service Threat-Assessment Model

- Incidents of targeted violence at school are rarely impulsive or the result of someone “snapping.” The attacks are typically the result of a pattern of organized thinking and behavior.
- Before most incidents, the attacker told someone, usually a peer, about the idea and/or plan.
- There is no accurate or useful profile of “the school shooter.” Characteristics of these individuals varied greatly. Violence is viewed as the interaction among the attacker, situation, target, and the setting.
Most attackers had previously used guns, although most did not necessarily demonstrate a "fascination" with weapons or explosives.

Most shooting incidents were not resolved by law enforcement intervention.
- More than half of the attacks ended before law enforcement arrival on scene.
  - In these cases, staff or students stopped the attacker, the attacker stopped on his own, or he committed suicide.
  - Half of the incidents lasted 20 minutes or less.
  - Therefore, schools may make best use of their resources by focusing on prevention.

In most cases, other students were involved in some capacity, such as influencing or providing encouragement.

In 75% of the cases, other students knew about the attack before it occurred in the form of either a vague idea something big was going to happen, and often the date and time or exact details.

In more than two-thirds of the cases, the perpetrator's history of having been bullied, harassed, threatened, or injured played a key role in the attack.

Most attackers engaged in some behavior before the incident that caused others to be concerned or indicated a need for help.

Questions to ask during a student interview
- Identify possible stressors.
- Identify thoughts of revenge.
- Identify experiences with/attitudes toward weapons.
- Explore history of/attitudes toward violence.
Questions to ask during a student interview
- Identify signs of depression, helplessness, and/or hopelessness.
- Identify suicidal ideation.
- Identify homicidal ideation.

Questions to ask during a student interview
- Explore motivations for violence.
- Identify additional psychiatric disorders.
- Identify possible helping resources.

Questions for Others
- For family and/or friends:
  - Has the student at risk told you of any ideas or plan to commit a violent act against the school? Against any specific person(s)? If so, describe these ideas/plans. Has he or she taken any steps to act on these ideas/plans?

- For school staff, family and/or friends:
  - How organized is the student at risk? How capable do you think he/she is of acting on his/her ideas? How concerned do you think staff and family should be about the safety of the target(s)?
Secret Service Threat-Assessment Model

Questions for Others
- For identified target:
  - How well do you know the student at risk of violence? How well does this person know your work and personal lifestyle patterns? What changes could make an attack less likely? How seriously do you take this threat of potential attack? How concerned are you about your safety?
- It is infrequent (less than 25% of cases) for direct threats to be made to the intended victims.

Secret Service Threat-Assessment Model

Other Assessment Procedures
- Review the following student data for at-risk students:
  - group achievement test scores,
  - test scores from local district assessment measures,
  - attendance records,
  - discipline records,
  - language proficiency status, and
  - school history.
- Analyze the academic instruction across subject areas and suggest modifications if needed.
- Develop a behavior contract if needed.
- Develop a plan to improve attendance if needed.
  - Documentation of poor school attendance following prescribed district procedures.

Responding to At-Risk Youth

Teach appropriate behavior and social problem-solving skills in the classroom or in a small group setting.

Additional problems or risk factors are addressed through determining student and family needs.
- Referrals made to appropriate support systems.

Protective factors for student are analyzed and provisions made to continue or to add to these factors, which provide support for the at-risk student.
- For example, provide an adult mentor who meets periodically with the student.
Responding to High Risk Youth

- Determine if there are any imminent warning signs. If there are, then refer student to the Risk Assessment Team for an immediate suicide and/or homicide risk assessment.
- If imminent warning signs are not present, then give the student a high priority for a Student Support Meeting. Assign a Student Support Team member (e.g., principal, mental health specialist, or master teacher) to provide informal consultation until a formal meeting may be scheduled.
- At the formal meeting, develop recommendations for responding to high-risk youth and consider the need for a referral for Special Education services.
- Consider a referral to school site mental health and community-based mental health services.

Responding to High Risk Youth

- Consider the need to revise student’s behavior contract and/or to conduct a more in-depth behavioral analysis.
- Obtain parental permission to exchange information with the appropriate community agencies to determine if student is eligible for additional services. If available, call a meeting with other agency personnel to focus on provisions for wrap-around intervention and support for the student and family.
- Develop an action plan for immediate interventions that includes provisions for increased supervision.

Responding to High Risk Youth: AAP Policy Statement

- Between 79 and 94% of schools have “zero tolerance” policies.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics argues that it is wrong to mandate automatic expulsion or referral to juvenile court without taking into consideration the specifics of each case.
- Children who are suspended are from a population that is least likely to have supervision at home.
  - Children with single parents are between 2 and 4 times as likely to be suspended or expelled from school as children with both parents at home.
  - Some of the children most likely to be suspended (e.g., those with mental illness, substance abuse problems) are most in need of adult supervision.
Responding to High Risk Youth: AAP Policy Statement

- When youth are not in school they are MORE likely to become involved in a physical fight and to carry a weapon.
- Out of school adolescents are also more likely to smoke; use alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine; and engage in sexual intercourse
- Suicidal ideation and behavior may be expected to occur more often at these times of isolation
- The lack of professional assistance at the time of exclusion from school, a time when a student most needs it, increases the risk of permanent school drop out.

Responding to High Risk Youth: AAP Policy Statement

- Out-of-school placement for suspension or expulsion should be limited to the most egregious circumstances.
- For in-home suspension or expulsion, the school must be able to demonstrate how attendance at a school site, even in an alternative setting with a low ratio of highly trained staff to students, would be inadequate to prevent a student from causing harm to himself or herself or to others.

Are Schools Really Safe?

- The Daily Show reports on bullet proof books.
Required Resources


Recommended Resource

Final Examination

Questions

Next Meeting

Crisis Preparedness and Response

Read
– Brock et al. (2009), Chapters 1-5
– Lockyer & Eastin (2000)

Turn in
– Field Observation/Interview