

PROTECTING ★ THE ★ UNPROTECTED



# Ohio School Threat Assessment Training

## Reference Guide

Office of Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost  
Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy



**DAVE YOST**  
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

# LETTER FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

**My Fellow Ohioans,**

I'm here to make a request of you: I want you to help stop school violence before it ever happens. In short, I want you to be a hero.

When a school shooting takes place, we inevitably learn afterward that people knew the perpetrator posed a threat, but nothing was done. It's time to stop this pattern and get in front of the problem before it turns into a tragedy.

We know prevention works. In 2016, a 16-year-old student was overheard discussing a plot to attack Hilliard Davidson High School near Columbus. Fortunately, another student reported that conversation to the school resource officer. School officials worked as a team with local, state and federal law enforcement to gather evidence, monitor the student and arrest him.

As a result, the student was prevented from acting out and instead received psychological help. Most important, no one was hurt.

That team, a threat assessment team, is something you can, and should, build in your own school district. The eight steps covered in our video training explain nationally proven best practices for creating such a team, assessing threats from students and others, and responding to them. This reference guide includes all of the written material that appears on screen.

Thank you for taking part in this training. I firmly believe it will save lives.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Yost". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dave Yost  
Ohio Attorney General



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Experts ..... 2**
- Introduction ..... 7**
- Step 1: Establish a Multidisciplinary Threat Assessment Team ..... 9**
- Step 2: Define Prohibited and Concerning Behaviors ..... 13**
- Step 3: Create a Central Reporting Mechanism..... 15**
- Step 4: Determine the Threshold for Law Enforcement Intervention..... 17**
- Step 5: Establish Assessment Procedures ..... 19**
- Step 6: Develop Risk Management Options..... 21**
- Step 7: Create and Promote Safe School Climates ..... 24**
- Step 8: Conduct Training for All Stakeholders ..... 27**
- Conclusion ..... 29**

# EXPERTS



## **DR. LINA ALATHARI**

### **Chief, U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center**

Dr. Alathari oversees targeted violence behavioral research at the National Threat Assessment Center and manages training and consultation programs to get the word out on best practices. She has also worked in crisis intervention, behavioral analysis and mental health treatment, and she earned her Ph.D. in Cognitive Neuropsychology from George Washington University.



## **DEPUTY MELISSA BOGUNOVICH**

### **School Resource Officer, Stark County Sheriff's Office**

Deputy Bogunovich has been with the Stark County Sheriff's Office for 24 years, including two decades as an SRO and DARE officer. At Marlinton Local Schools, she serves on the threat assessment team and has created multiple programs to help students build trust with school-based authority figures.



## **DR. DEWEY CORNELL**

### **Professor, University of Virginia**

Dr. Cornell is the lead author of the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines, a model he has been testing in schools and refining since 2001. The clinical psychologist began his career evaluating violent criminal offenders and people found not guilty by reason of insanity. He earned his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Michigan and also studies racial inequities in schools.



## **PAOLO DEMARIA**

### **Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction**

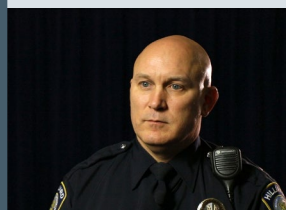
DeMaria leads the Ohio Department of Education, which administers school funding, state tests and school report cards; develops academic standards; and licenses teachers. A public-service veteran of 28 years, DeMaria previously worked for the Ohio DOE's Center for School Options and Finance, Ohio's Office of Budget and Management and the state Board of Regents. He has a master's in Public Administration from The Ohio State University.



## **CHIEF ROBERT FISHER**

### **Hilliard Division of Police**

Chief Fisher has been at the helm of Hilliard's police force since 2015. The Coast Guard and Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran started his law-enforcement career in 1990 with the Lebanon, Ohio, police and also served on the Sharonville force. As chief, Fisher has committed to building strong connections between Hilliard police and local schools and effective communication between his SROs and patrol officers.



## **OFFICER JON GLEASON**

### **School Resource Officer, Hilliard Division of Police**

The 26-year veteran of the Hilliard police and a school resource officer of more than seven years believes that building relationships with students changes their perspectives on law enforcement, prevents issues from growing into bigger problems, and makes students safer and more successful. Central Ohio Crime Stoppers recognized Officer Gleason as the Law Enforcement Officer of the Year in 2017.



# EXPERTS



**JAMIE HARDWICK**  
**Health Partners of Western Ohio**

The licensed social worker and chemical dependency counselor directs Health Partners' Spartan Health Center at Lima High School, which provides behavioral health services to students, families and school staff members. Hardwick has participated in threat assessment teams in Lima City Schools for about five years.



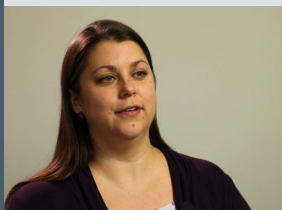
**OFFICER JOHN HARTMAN**  
**School Resource Officer, Delaware Police Department;**  
**Vice President, Ohio School Resource Officers Association**

The 20-year police veteran is a member of Delaware City Schools' threat assessment team; teaches drug abuse resistance, firearms skills, self-defense and many other topics; and has been honored numerous times with his department's Distinguished Service Award. As an SRO, Officer Hartman emphasizes building trust and relationships throughout schools to help keep students safe.



**DR. JILL JACKSON**  
**Consultant, Ohio Department of Education**

Dr. Jackson consults with ODE's Office of Integrated Student Supports, whose "whole child" approach considers issues such as school-based health care, trauma-informed schools, vulnerable youth and family engagement. Dr. Jackson, whose 27-year career has focused on impoverished children and families, has a doctorate in Organizational Psychology from Capella University.



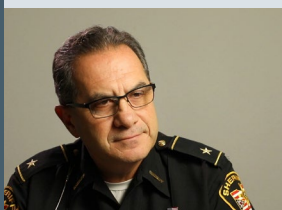
**EMILY JORDAN**  
**Consultant, Ohio Department of Education**

Jordan, a Licensed Independent Social Worker, consults with ODE's Office of Integrated Student Supports focusing on mental-health and behavioral help for students. Threat assessment is a component of her work to build school cultures in which students feel heard and respected. She has a master's degree in Social Work from The Ohio State University.



**JOE KNOLL**  
**Superintendent, Marlington Local Schools**

Knoll has been superintendent of this Stark County school district (from which he also graduated) since 2012. Before that, he served as assistant superintendent of the Mahoning County Educational Service Center. Superintendent Knoll says his district's threat assessment teams prevent violence, help students succeed and foster community.



**SHERIFF GEORGE MAIER**  
**Stark County**

Sheriff Maier, a firm believer in the merits of school threat assessment, oversees a staff of about 250 in Ohio's eighth-most-populous county, which has 17 school districts. He began his career in 1981 as a patrol officer for the Hartville police, then spent 25 years at the State Highway Patrol, rising to district commander. After a few years as assistant director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety, he became sheriff of Stark County in 2013.

# EXPERTS



**STATE REP. GAYLE MANNING**  
**55th Ohio House District**

Rep. Manning, an elementary-school teacher for 37 years, co-sponsored House Bill 123, the SAVE Students Act, which would make it mandatory for schools serving grades 6-12 to have trained threat assessment teams. She represents a large chunk of Lorain County, including Elyria and North Ridgeville. Rep. Manning previously served eight years in the Ohio Senate.



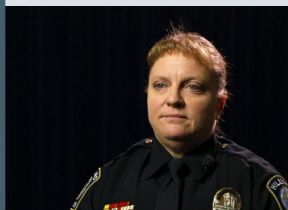
**DR. JOHN MARSCHHAUSEN**  
**Superintendent, Hilliard City Schools**

As superintendent since 2013, Dr. Marschhausen supports threat assessment and related initiatives, such as student-led Hope Squads, to build a safe environment in which all students feel supported. In addition to his work in Hilliard, Dr. Marschhausen has served as Superintendent in Residence at The Ohio State University and on the Governor's Executive Workforce Board. He has a doctorate from Capella University.



**EMILY MAYFIELD**  
**Acting Administrator, Ohio School Safety Center**

Mayfield leads the Ohio Department of Public Safety office that operates the state's school safety tip line and central reporting system. Anyone can call in or text a school-related concern, or submit one through the Safer Ohio app. The center evaluates and sends those tips to schools. Mayfield has been with the Department of Public Safety since 2015, the year she graduated from the University of Akron.



**SGT. SUZANNE MURACO**  
**Hilliard Division of Police**

The 24-year police veteran is a detective sergeant in the Hilliard police Criminal Investigations Unit and a member of the school safety team. Sgt. Muraco recently was recognized for organizing the first active-shooter training to involve all 1,600 members of the Hilliard City School District. The Hilliard native is also a state-certified police instructor specializing in self-defense, firearms and patrol tactics.



**MARK PORTER**  
**Director of Law Enforcement Operations, Ohio Attorney General's Office**

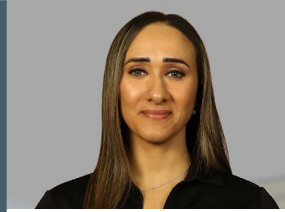
During his 26-year career with the U.S. Secret Service, Porter spent seven years conducting and supervising threat assessment investigations as part of the Protective Intelligence and Assessment Division. He retired in 2017 as the Agent in Charge and joined then-Ohio Auditor Dave Yost's team as Director of Public Integrity. At the Attorney General's Office, he built the Ohio School Threat Assessment program.



**MAX SCHACHTER**  
**Founder, Safe Schools For Alex**

In 2018, Schachter's 14-year-old son was killed by a gunman at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, as were 16 others. The Parkland, Florida, father started a foundation and a memorial scholarship to advocate for safer schools and to honor his son. He has been appointed to numerous state and federal commissions on school safety. Before the attack, Schachter worked in financial services.

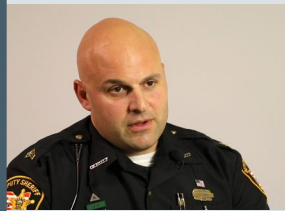
# EXPERTS



## **SARAH SHENDY**

### **Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy; Officer, Copley Police Department**

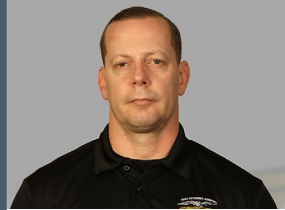
The 11-year veteran of law enforcement spent multiple years as an SRO and DARE officer with the Copley Police Department. In 2016, Officer Shendy joined the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy, and she continues to work with the Copley force on evenings, weekends and holidays. At OPOTA, she teaches human relations courses and school resource officers.



## **SGT. CHAD SMITH**

### **School Resource Officer, Stark County Sheriff's Office**

Sgt. Smith, an SRO for 16 years, supervises the 15 school resource officers at the sheriff's office and serves in the Plain Local Schools. He became a Certified Master SRO in 2018 and commonly leads weeklong trainings for SROs from across the region.



## **MICAH STOLL**

### **Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy**

Stoll joined OPOTA in 2013 after serving 10 years as a police officer with the Rochester Police Department and Sangamon County Sheriff's Office, both in Illinois. As a trainer, he has focused on firearms, first-responder and defensive tactics, as well as school resource officers and active threats for educators.



## **CHIEF DEAN TONDIGLIA**

### **Kent State University Police**

Also Kent State's Director of Public Safety, Chief Tondiglia employs the threat assessment model and has seen its benefits for the university community. He joined the Kent State Police Department in 1981, became chief in 2015 and earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from the university. Chief Tondiglia also is a graduate of the FBI National Academy and the Police Executive Leadership College.



## **ERIN WESSENDORF-WORTMAN**

### **Ennis Britton Co., LPA**

Wessendorf-Wortman is an attorney with Ennis Britton, a statewide law firm that works with about 140 boards of education and educational service centers. The graduate of Ohio State University's law school specializes in student discipline and rights, relationships with school resource officers, employee investigations and other areas.







## INTRODUCTION

### 'Be a hero'

It's our job to protect our kids, especially at school, which should be a safe place for students to prosper. To do that, preventing violence — not just responding once it happens — is essential. This training will explain how to set up a multidisciplinary threat assessment team, a model for action that has proved to prevent violence. The approach works because it takes threats and concerning behaviors as indications of a problem and then moves to solve the problem, cutting the risk that students will harm themselves or others.

### Reference text

The following text appears on screen in this training:

#### **THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM MODEL**

- The team attempts to interrupt people who are on a pathway to commit acts of violence.
- If the team's assessment reveals true substantive danger, a plan is developed to disrupt the chance of violence.

#### **OHIO SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT TRAINING**

##### **Steps:**

1. Establish a Multidisciplinary Threat Assessment Team
2. Define Prohibited and Concerning Behaviors
3. Create a Central Reporting Mechanism
4. Determine the Threshold for Law Enforcement Intervention
5. Establish Assessment Procedures
6. Develop Risk Management Options
7. Create and Promote Safe School Climates
8. Conduct Training for All Stakeholders

“I couldn't understand how, after 9/11, we made our airports safe and, after the Oklahoma City bombing, we made our federal buildings safe, but it's been 20 years since Columbine and children and teachers continue to be murdered in their classrooms.”

— **Max Schachter**  
whose son was murdered at school

### Speakers

#### **DAVE YOST, Ohio Attorney General**

“We aim to prevent school violence using national, proven best practices. This is not a top-down approach; instead, it is guidance to local law enforcement and school districts to fill a critical gap.”

#### **DR. DEWEY CORNELL, University of Virginia**

“Every student threat is kind of a red flag saying, ‘I've got a problem I can't solve.’ And so, we take a problem-solving approach to threat assessment.”

#### **DR. LINA ALATHARI, U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center**

“A threat assessment essentially is a three-step process: You want to be able to identify individuals in the community who might be exhibiting concerning behavior. You want to have protocols in place so that you can assess, ‘Does this person pose a risk of violence?’ And if you think that they do, then you have to come up with mitigation strategies.”

#### **CHIEF DEAN TONDIGLIA, Kent State University Police**

“These resources give a nice road map of how to successfully implement a team and then how to deal with those threats.”

#### **JOE KNOLL, Superintendent, Marlinton Local Schools**

“To me, this is 100 percent prevention vs. reaction. And sadly, in my world, sometimes we do a lot of reacting to things.”

“If school districts and superintendents aren't here, this is a true piece of the puzzle that we need to be looking at.”

#### **MAX SCHACHTER, Founder, Safe Schools For Alex**

“I feel that if a threat assessment had been done correctly, my little boy and the 16 other victims might still be alive today.”



# STEP 1 || ESTABLISH A MULTIDISCIPLINARY THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM

## 'A coordinated team approach'

Establishing a team that will direct, manage and document the threat assessment process is the first step to comprehensively preventing school violence. Teams should include personnel from a variety of disciplines within the school community (such as teachers, guidance counselors and school administrators) and community partners (such as law officers and mental health professionals).

## Reference text

### THREAT ASSESSMENT MODEL

- Primary purpose: prevent violence from taking place
- Used to evaluate the risk posed by a student or other individual
- Used to uncover any evidence that indicates a threat is likely to be carried out

### 6 PRINCIPLES FOR IMPLEMENTING THREAT ASSESSMENT IN SCHOOLS

1. Prevention
2. Context
3. Investigation
4. Facts, not traits
5. Gather information
6. Decide: Is the student a threat?

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“Too often I see in schools, law enforcement is over here, the school administration is over there — they’re not on the same page. ... It’s far better to have folks working together than at cross-purposes.”

— **Dr. Dewey Cornell**, violence prevention expert

## Speakers

### **DR. LINA ALATHARI,** **U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center**

“The most comprehensive protocols can be enacted when you have people with varying points of view who bring in their experience and perspective to an assessment.”

### **DR. DEWEY CORNELL,** **University of Virginia**

“We want law enforcement and mental health to be working together, with administrative coordination.”

### **JAMIE HARDWICK,** Health **Partners of Western Ohio**

“There are things that we see that are red flags, way before a student’s on campus with a gun, that could be brought to a threat assessment team to intervene — to not only prevent a mass shooting or these schools being harmed, but also to look at the care that child needs.”

“You’re able to identify students as early as kindergarten, as early as preschool even, that probably need some type of intervention. Without threat assessment, they may go without help.”

### **SHERIFF GEORGE MAIER,** **Stark County**

“As the county sheriff, this was easy for me to adopt as a mindset and a concept because we’re big on collaboration and working together.”

### **CHIEF DEAN TONDIGLIA,** **Kent State University Police**

“Law enforcement should be on the team — not to take legal action necessarily — but to lend their insight and expertise. Law enforcement officers have a great deal of training and recognize behaviors and actions that maybe someone in other disciplines aren’t familiar with.”

### **MAX SCHACHTER,** Founder, **Safe Schools For Alex**

“The murderer in Parkland was able to accumulate over 55 different disciplinary incidents in school; law enforcement had over 40 different interactions with him out of school. ... If these silos had been connected, I feel like Alex would still be here today.”

### **ERIN WESSENDORF-WORTMAN,** **Ennis Britton Co., LPA**

“The first step in establishing that team is making sure everybody is labeled as a school official. Once you do that ... you’ve opened up access to student records.”

### **STATE REP. GAYLE MANNING,** **55th Ohio House District**

“We’ve got to find ways to protect our kids, and I think the best way to do that is to make sure that we’re prepared.”

### **PAOLO DEMARIA,** **Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction**

“Every partner on the team brings a different kind of training to the table.”

## 1. PREVENTION

Those who carry out acts of violence often:

- Develop thorough plans.
- Determine targets.
- Make maps.
- Obtain weapons.
- Talk about it with someone or online.

## 2. CONTEXT

To determine the risk, gather information about:

- Possible attacker
- Significant events in their life
- Setting in which the threat was made
- Choice of target

## 3. INVESTIGATION

- Attempt to accumulate reliable evidence that verifies all claims about the threat.
- This prevents conclusions being made based on rumors or unverified allegations.

## 4. FACTS, NOT TRAITS

- Each investigation should stand on its own.
- Each investigation is guided by analysis of facts and behaviors specific to the one person and the one situation.
- When judgments about an individual's risk of violence are based on facts, then traits or characteristics of the individual are insignificant.

## 5. GATHER INFORMATION

In many school attacks, there were facts and behaviors that existed at school and outside of it that might have alerted the school or law enforcement to the risk of attack posed by a particular individual.

## 6. DECIDE: IS THE STUDENT A THREAT?

- MAKING a threat vs. POSING a threat.
- In more than 80% of school shooting cases, shooters did NOT threaten the target directly, but they DID communicate their intent or plans to others before the attack.

## ACTIVITIES OF THE THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM

- Receive reports about concerning behaviors
- Gather information
- Assess any risks posed to the school
- Develop intervention and management strategies to prevent or mitigate risks

## ADVANTAGES OF HAVING A THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM AT EACH SCHOOL

- Easier to assess threats and establish a regular routine
- Response time and reaction can be more immediate

- Better positioned to incorporate environmental context in the assessment
- Eliminates potential disagreement between a regional team and school personnel on how to handle a threat
- Able to maintain contact with an individual and monitor the plan put into place

## MEMBERS OF THE THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM

*Most teams will have 5 to 8 people.*

### School personnel:

- Administrators
- Teachers
- Guidance counselors

### Community partners:

- Law enforcement
- Mental health professionals

## LEADERSHIP OF THE THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM

- It is important to assign roles and responsibilities.
- One person must be designated the leader of the group. This will often be the superintendent or a designee.
- Law enforcement is a member, not the leader.
- But the law enforcement member does take a lead role when a law has been broken.

## DEFINE THE POLICIES OF THE THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM

- Purpose and scope of the team
- Role of each team member
- Threshold of concern for initiating an assessment, inquiry, investigation
- Who will conduct interviews
- Type of information that should be gathered
- Who will document the team's efforts

## MEETINGS OF THE THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM

- Meet whenever a concerning student or situation is brought to their attention.
- Also schedule regular meetings for:
  - » Discussions.
  - » Reviews of procedures.
  - » Follow-up on students.
- Meeting on a regular basis allows the team to operate as a cohesive unit.

## RECORDS OF THE THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM

- Establish an organized record-keeping system.
- Most threats of violence also involve discipline infractions and, therefore, should be recorded, even if the threat is quickly resolved.
- For substantive threats, prepare a safety plan.
- Notes about a student shared among the team may be considered part of the student's record.







## STEP 2 || DEFINE PROHIBITED AND CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

### 'The escalation to violence'

Teams need to establish policies defining prohibited behaviors, but just as important is establishing the significance of concerning behaviors. Sudden differences in how a student acts — for example, significant changes in appearance, grades or attendance — can be a precursor to students harming themselves or others. Recognizing these behaviors can lead to early intervention and save lives.

### Reference text

#### FACTORS TO BALANCE

- Threats occur on a regular basis at schools. We don't want to overreact to threats that aren't serious, and we don't want to underreact to a serious threat.
- Policies should focus on incidents that are most likely to take place, more so than extreme incidents that are unlikely to occur.

#### PREVENTION STARTS LONG BEFORE ANY VIOLENT ACT

- 4 out of 5 young adults who attempt suicide give clear warning signs.
- 100% of school shooters exhibited concerning behaviors prior to the attack.
- In 77% of school shootings, at least one other person had some knowledge of the attacker's plan.

#### THREATS

- All threats and any type of violence must be taken seriously and investigated, and it is important to have specific procedures for doing so.

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“This multidisciplinary, comprehensive approach not only mitigates threats of violence, but it actually decreases rates of suicide, bullying and self-harm.”  
— **Dr. Lina Alathari**, U.S. Secret Service  
National Threat Assessment Center

### Speakers

#### **DR. LINA ALATHARI, U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center**

“You don't just want to focus on whether someone made a statement indicating a threat or not. You want to focus on: Are they suicidal? Have they lost all hope? Are they fixated on an individual? Do they have grievances?”

“What are these concerning behaviors? It's behavior changes, talk of suicide, being depressive, being bullied or being the bully themselves. All of these lower-level behavior changes are really important.”

#### **MAX SCHACHTER, Founder, Safe Schools For Alex**

“Along with us instituting threat assessment teams, we also need to be educating all the school administrators and teachers on the signs, the precursors to violence.”

“Threat assessment teams are not here to punish children. They're here to help children and get them the services that they need.”

#### **JOE KNOLL, Superintendent, Marlinton Local Schools**

“What we are finding out is, this threat assessment team isn't only for the hardcore type of school violence issues. At Marlinton,

we're getting more reports from kids caring about kids.”

#### **SHERIFF GEORGE MAIER, Stark County**

“We found that there was a student that was actually considering self-harm. That student was given immediate care, and, through that, I think we probably averted a tragedy in that family. The father was so apologetic — not that he needed to be — but it's something that he didn't know that was going on right under the roof of their home.”

#### **JAMIE HARDWICK, Health Partners of Western Ohio**

“Maybe each person in the school saw one of those things and never talked to another staff person — to say: ‘Hey, I noticed so-and-so cut their hair off. I wonder why.’ ‘Yeah, I noticed that, too. Their grades are failing.’ — to really put the pieces of that puzzle together.”

“I said to him, ‘At any point was there a staff person or another student who said: ‘Hey, are you OK? Your grades are failing; you were an honor roll student. You've cut off all your hair. You're unkept.’” And he said no. They just said, ‘Hey, you better get them grades up.’ So there were all those signs six weeks prior to this incident.”

- The procedures should clarify the role of the school in relation to that of law enforcement.
- Threats can be spoken, written or gestured.
- Threats can be expressed directly or indirectly.
- A concerning behavior can equal a threat.

### **DEFINE PROHIBITED BEHAVIORS**

- Engaging in violence
- Bringing a weapon to school
- Bullying
- Harassing others
- Making a threat

### **DEFINE CONCERNING BEHAVIORS**

- Decline in academic performance
- Truancy
- Becoming isolated
- Sudden change in behavior
- Substance abuse
- Mental health crisis
- Problems at home

### **WARNING SIGNS**

Most students who pose a threat will indicate their intentions at some point.

- To a friend
- On social media

- At school
- In written work or drawings

### **THOUGHT PROCESS LEADING TO AN ATTACK**

- Begins with an idea
- Progresses to the development of a plan
- Secures the means to carry out the plan
- Culminates in an attack

### **EXAMPLE: COLUMBINE, 1999 THE PERPETRATORS SPENT A YEAR:**

- Discussing what they wanted to do.
- Monitoring the movements of students.
- Making maps.
- Acquiring weapons.

### **ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

- Focus on what a student is doing and saying.
- Do not focus on whether a student looks like those who have attacked in the past.
- There is no profile that will accurately determine if a student is going to commit a violent act.
- Most students who display risk factors will commit no acts of violence.
- The student's behavior and communication are important factors for identifying and evaluating the possible risk the student poses.



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## STEP 3 || CREATE A CENTRAL REPORTING MECHANISM

### ‘See something, say something’

Having a central reporting program allows students, parents, teachers and others to anonymously report threats, bullying and other concerning behaviors. Those tips can then be funneled to the threat assessment team for evaluation.

### Reference text

#### PROMOTING THE CENTRAL REPORTING MECHANISM

- How does it work?
- Why will it benefit students, staff and members of the community?
- Reassure all stakeholders that those who send information can remain anonymous.

#### SAFER OHIO SCHOOL TIP LINE

- Can be used for any Ohio school, whether or not that school district registered to use it.
- 844-SAFER-OH (844-723-3764)
- [www.saferschools.ohio.gov](http://www.saferschools.ohio.gov)

#### STUDENT REPORTING

- Students are an important part of the reporting process.
- Students are often the people most knowledgeable about an attacker's idea or plan.
- Often, students are reluctant to report this information to an adult.

“If you don't know what to do with a piece of information, report it to the tip line because you never know how valuable that detail could be if it's pieced together with 15 other pieces of information.”

— **Emily Mayfield,**  
Acting Administrator,  
Ohio School Safety Center

### Speakers

**DR. LINA ALATHARI,**  
**U.S. Secret Service**  
**National Threat Assessment Center**

“If you're going to have a reporting mechanism, whether it's a phone number in a school or an app that someone can text a tip to, you want to make sure you have the infrastructure in place behind it so someone's acting on it, so that things don't fall through the cracks.”

**EMILY MAYFIELD, Acting Administrator,**  
**Ohio School Safety Center**

“The Safer Ohio Tip Line is a free service for all schools that is monitored 24/7. And you have options for reporting. You can call, you can text, you could message through the app, and you can truly remain anonymous.”





## STEP 4 || DETERMINE THE THRESHOLD FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT INTERVENTION

### ‘A supporting role’

How a law enforcement officer fits into the threat assessment team can vary from place to place. Many teams want the officer involved from the beginning of each case, even when no laws have been broken, because of the officer’s valuable input and community contacts and knowledge. Officers on the team should encourage a policy within their home departments that asks all officers who deal with students in the field to pass along those details. Communication is essential to preventing violence.

### Reference text

#### TIPS/REPORTS THAT REQUIRE LAW ENFORCEMENT INTERVENTION

- Threats of physical violence
- Planned school attacks

Tips of this type are generally less common.

#### COMMON TIPS/REPORTS

- Thoughts of suicide
- Bullying
- Drugs
- Cutting
- Depression

#### LAW ENFORCEMENT’S ROLE ON THE TEAM

- Supporting role.
- Superintendent or superintendent’s designee leads the team.
- School and law enforcement must have good working relationship.
- Gray area: Attacker makes indirect threat. This may not reach a criminal level.

#### LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION

- Arrests and court involvement still a last resort.
- Creates potential for negative effects on the arrested student’s long-term educational outcome.
- A study found arrest doubles the probability of a high school student dropping out.

“We’re not looking to get people into the criminal justice system. We’re looking to keep them out of the criminal justice system.”

— **Stark County Sheriff George Maier**

### Speakers

#### CHIEF DEAN TONDIGLIA, Kent State University Police

“It’s invaluable to have the law enforcement perspective, even when there may not be a crime.”

#### SHERIFF GEORGE MAIER, Stark County

“When the bell rings and we close the lights at the school and everybody goes home and it’s the end of the day, there are still things happening in our community that involve the school and the students each and every day.”

#### SGT. SUZANNE MURACO, Hilliard Division of Police

“It was a single-parent atmosphere where the mom was trying her hardest to not only pay the bills and keep shelter over their heads, but trying to figure out how to help with her son. So we came together as a community with resources that second time, rather than charges.”

#### OFFICER JOHN HARTMAN, Delaware Police SRO, VP of OSROA

“That just goes to show the relationship the police department and the school district and the school district administrators have with each other. It’s very much a team approach.”

#### JOE KNOLL, Superintendent, Marlington Local Schools

“My SROs are on that threat assessment team, and I go to them right out of the gate — just initially. They’re part of that team. We don’t wait. ... And what’s really neat about that is, they have a lot of connections already in the community.”

#### OFFICER JON GLEASON, Hilliard Police SRO

“I tell them this all the time: I have 1,732 children that I’m responsible for, that I care for. The kids at my high school know that.”



## STEP 5 || ESTABLISH ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

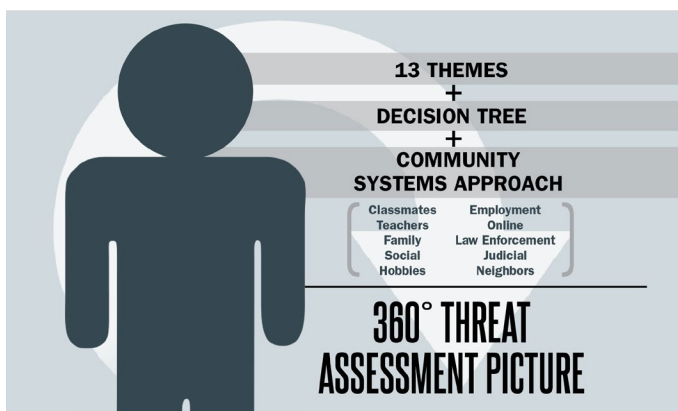
### ‘A step-by-step process’

Teams must establish clear procedures to guide how they assess a student’s thinking, behavior and circumstances and how they identify appropriate interventions. Procedures used by the Secret Service and Dr. Dewey Cornell provide excellent and proven frameworks on which to model your program.

### Reference text

#### 13 THEMES TO GUIDE A THREAT ASSESSMENT | U.S. Secret Service

1. The student’s motives and goals
2. Concerning, unusual or threatening communications
3. Inappropriate interests
4. Access to weapons
5. Stressful events
6. Impact of emotional and developmental issues
7. Evidence of desperation, hopelessness or suicide
8. Whether the student views violence as an option to solve problems
9. Whether others are concerned about the student’s statements or behaviors
10. Capacity to carry out an attack
11. Evidence of planning for an attack
12. Consistency between the student’s statements and actions
13. Positive or prosocial influences and events



### “COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES”

By Dr. Dewey Cornell

Forms available for free download at: [www.SchoolTA.com](http://www.SchoolTA.com)

“We look at the motive, why they engaged in the behavior that elicited concern. What’s going on in their lives? Are they having setbacks, losses and challenges that they’re not able to cope with? All of that really is the comprehensive approach.”

— **Dr. Lina Alathari**, U.S. Secret Service  
National Threat Assessment Center

### Speakers

#### **DR. LINA ALATHARI**, U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center

“I can tell you almost every single attacker had significant home life issues related to parents, experiencing whether it’s abuse, domestic violence, financial strains and so on, arrested charges for the parents.”

#### **PAOLO DEMARIA**, Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction

“We all need a step-by-step checklist from time to time just to make sure we’re thinking through the right process for doing this kind of work. . . . But there is no one-size-fits-all. We also have to be sensitive to the particular circumstances.”

#### **SARAH SHENDY**, Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy, Copley Police Officer

“Conducting a threat assessment is not intended to prevent all forms of student violence, but it is a useful means of identifying potentially violent situations that, if investigated properly, might be prevented.”

#### **MICAH STOLL**, Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy

“The decision tree is an easy-to-follow model that provides a structured way of assessing concerning behaviors and threats.”

#### **DR. DEWEY CORNELL**, University of Virginia

“When a kid makes a threat, he’s basically saying, ‘I’ve run out of problem-solving strategies, and now I’m using “old faithful,” which is, make a threat.’”



## STEP 6 || DEVELOP RISK MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

### 'In need of guidance'

Once a team completes an assessment of the student, it must assess the risk of the student harming themselves or others. In response to findings, the team will create a unique management plan to address the student's risk factors, both to ensure the safety of others and to help the student get back on the right track.

### Reference text

#### RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- Is a student at risk of harming themselves or someone else?
- Which risk management options should be used?
- Not predicting; instead, looking for risk factors
- Reduce the student's risk for engaging in violence; make positive outcomes more likely.
- Cornell: Template questions help assemble a plan.
- Each student who comes to the team's attention will require an individualized management plan.

#### RISK OF VIOLENCE

- Base judgments on behaviorally relevant facts, not traits or characteristics that seem to pose a threat.
- Profiles can shift attention away from more reliable facts and evidence.
- The team makes judgments based on the student's behaviors and communications.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

“The school district can't do it by themselves. Mental health agencies can't do it by themselves. Children services can't do it alone. It's all intertwined, and we have to work collaboratively to be able to serve not just the student, but the family as a whole.”

— **Jamie Hardwick**, Health Partners of Western Ohio

### Speakers

#### **DR. LINA ALATHARI, U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center**

“The response has to be individualized. There is no cookie-cutter approach to management. It really is warranted on what that kid is exhibiting, what the student's feeling, what the context is of their life.”

#### **DR. DEWEY CORNELL, University of Virginia**

“Anybody can be violent, in the right circumstances, in the right situation. I don't like the idea that there are certain people who are violent and other people who are not violent. So we're always looking at risk factors.”

#### **JAMIE HARDWICK, Health Partners of Western Ohio**

“He shared with me that the night before, he and his mom were in an argument, verbal, that resulted in them getting physical. He held a knife to her throat. He shared with me that he was very worried for her safety and what he would do to her.”

“He just starts crying, and, at this point, we're in the middle of the street surrounded by law enforcement. I knew if he got spooked, he was probably going to end up in jail, maybe tased if they felt threatened. And I'm like, 'Hold

on. Just, everybody, hold on.' The school resource officer came over ... and we were able to calm the student down and ended up getting him the help that he needed.”

#### **JOE KNOLL, Superintendent, Marlington Local Schools**

“We were able to find where this individual had done searches for how to get weapons. It was pretty in-depth. And it was a little shocking because this was the first time that we had to deal with something of that magnitude. But the flipside of that is the positive that came out of it.”

#### **SGT. CHAD SMITH, Stark County Sheriff's Office SRO**

“Children Services removed that young lady from her home, along with her two siblings, because of what was going on. That was just us gathering as a quick threat assessment team, hearing some of the facts and actually going out and seeing for ourselves.”

#### **OFFICER JON GLEASON, Hilliard Police SRO**

“It became more of the need to reach out for help, encouragement and accessibility to counseling, as well as letting the guardian know (the student) was struggling with these other factors. And that's where I mean... it's a balancing act.”









“We need a climate in our schools where people understand the difference between snitching and seeking help.”

— **Dr. Dewey Cornell**,  
University of Virginia

“There were over a dozen kids who had been threatened or warned, and not one of them went to an adult. Nobody told a parent, a teacher, the school resource officer. They didn’t want to be a snitch, they didn’t trust school authorities, and then that shooting took place.”

— **Dr. Dewey Cornell**,  
University of Virginia

“We averted what could have been a tragedy because of the culture we built and the partnerships that we have in place.”

— **Dr. John Marschhausen**,  
Superintendent, Hilliard City Schools

“I always say, ‘You know, if I help one kid, that’s all that matters.’”

— **Deputy Melissa Bogunovich**, Stark County Sheriff’s Office SRO

## Speakers

### **DR. LINA ALATHARI, U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center**

“You want to make sure you’re kind of getting a pulse of what’s going on in the school. That’s step one.”

### **EMILY JORDAN, Ohio Department of Education**

“We’re teaching them the skills to be safe, to respect each other, to problem-solve — everything that’s needed to eliminate some of the challenges that behaviors can have.”

### **DR. JILL JACKSON, Ohio Department of Education**

“The idea of silos is quite an antiquated concept at this point, and we know that we work better together and we ensure the safety of staff and students when we are aware of what student behaviors are, earlier on.”

### **DR. DEWEY CORNELL, University of Virginia**

“To really have threat reporting, we need a school climate where students feel supported, cared about, and they also feel that the disciplinary consequences are strict — but fair.”

“In a ‘zero tolerance’ climate where students feel like schools are going to put the hammer down for the most minor misbehavior, students don’t want to report threats.”

“I’ve seen cases where students called up an assistant principal in the middle of the night, to say, ‘I’m worried about something I saw on a chat line.’ They did that because they were in a school where they trusted the adults there.”

### **JAMIE HARDWICK, Health Partners of Western Ohio**

“Within our health center, so many

students know it’s a safe place. They know that they can come down there and that they’re going to be taken care of whether they’re having a medical emergency or a mental health emergency.”

### **DR. JOHN MARSCHHAUSEN, Superintendent, Hilliard City Schools**

“We have Hope Squads where we have students who we have trained to be listeners and friends throughout the district. So in a building like one of our three high schools, there are 50 kids who have been trained to identify students reaching out for help.”

### **CHIEF ROBERT FISHER, Hilliard Division of Police**

“I think we saved a lot of lives by that interaction — that relationship that really started with that student and that school resource officer.”

### **JOE KNOLL, Superintendent, Marlington Local Schools**

“What’s big for me is making connections and relationships with kids. At Marlington, I’ve called it heartening vs. hardening.”

“If we’re going to win the battle with mental health and dealing with all these other issues and trauma and grief, we’ve got to connect to kids. I’ll go to my grave believing if we’re ever going to solve this problem, that’s how we’re going to do it.”

### **DEPUTY MELISSA BOGUNOVICH, Stark County Sheriff’s Office SRO**

“You see a whole different side of those kids that you don’t see during the day — you know, the ones that sit by themselves at lunch. Now all of a sudden, they’re alive and they’re engaging. And that’s just huge for us.”





## STEP 8 || CONDUCT TRAINING FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS

### ‘Everyone’s responsibility’

Building a comprehensive threat assessment program does no good if all the people who will interact with the system don’t understand it. Teams must take care to educate students and parents; faculty, staff and administration; and law enforcement and school resource officers. Team members themselves must stay up-to-date on the procedures and legal considerations, including knowing when safety trumps privacy concerns.

### Reference text

#### WHO ARE STAKEHOLDERS?

- Faculty, staff and administrators
- Students and parents
- SROs and other local law enforcement
- Anyone who could come forward with concerning information
- Anyone who might be involved in the threat assessment process

#### THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM TRAINING

- Table-top exercises
  - » Test hypothetical situations
  - » Simple or difficult
  - » Discuss roles, available options
- “Lessons Learned” training
  - » Review incidents from other schools
  - » How was it handled?
  - » What went well? What could be improved?

### Special note

Threat assessments are about people; vulnerability assessments focus on buildings, and they also are an integral part of making your school safe. Another section of this training, the Guide to Ohio School Vulnerability Assessments, maps out best practices for ensuring school buildings are as secure as possible. For security purposes, this training is available only on the Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway, which only law enforcement officers can access. If you are a school employee, please consult with your school resource officer to initiate this important safety measure.

“One of my biggest mantras is that everyone has a role in safety, and safety is everyone’s responsibility.”

— **Lina Alathari**, U.S. Secret Service  
National Threat Assessment Center

### Speakers

#### **DR. LINA ALATHARI**, U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center

“The most important people to train are the students. Students are the ones who have the information. They need to know that they can come forward, that it’s not snitching or tattling, that it really is about getting care for a classmate.”

#### **PAOLO DEMARIA**, Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction

“Anybody working in education today is constantly tuned into the realities that exist in our world. Teachers and educators are always on the lookout for ways to get better tools. ... That’s why we’re promoting this program and encouraging people to take it seriously, because these are proven practices.”

#### **MAX SCHACHTER**, Founder, Safe Schools For Alex

“See something, say something’ is not enough. You have to do something. And that’s what this is about.”

#### **SHERIFF GEORGE MAIER**, Stark County

“We have coordinated after-hours training, usually about once a month, where we bring all these school resource officers together. Doesn’t matter what patch they’re wearing. Doesn’t matter what color their shirt is — their focus and aim and their goal are the same.”

#### **DR. DEWEY CORNELL**, University of Virginia

“One of the biggest barriers and challenges that threat assessment teams are going to face is fear.”

#### **ERIN WESSENDORF-WORTMAN**, Ennis Britton Co., LPA

“You need to make sure that everybody understands the same groundwork, the same rules that you’re following, in sort of the same path for what the eventual outcome is going to be.”

 **NOTES**

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## CONCLUSION

### ‘Build a team of heroes’

A new U.S. Secret Service report studied 41 shootings in K-12 school buildings in the U.S. from 2008 through 2017. It found important insights — most important, that all attackers exhibited concerning behaviors before committing violence. That is why the threat assessment model shared in this training saves lives.

### Reference text

#### OHIO SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT TRAINING

1. Establish a Multidisciplinary Threat Assessment Team
2. Define Prohibited and Concerning Behaviors
3. Create a Central Reporting Mechanism
4. Determine the Threshold for Law Enforcement Intervention
5. Establish Assessment Procedures
6. Develop Risk Management Options
7. Create and Promote Safe School Climates
8. Conduct Training for All Stakeholders

#### KEY FINDINGS

U.S. Secret Service, “Protecting America’s Schools,” Nov. 2019

- There is no profile of a student attacker, nor is there a profile for the type of school that has been targeted.
- Attackers usually had multiple motives, the most common involving a grievance with classmates.
- Most attackers used firearms, and firearms were most often acquired from the home.

#### KEY FINDINGS

U.S. Secret Service, “Protecting America’s Schools,” Nov. 2019

- Most attackers had experienced psychological, behavioral or developmental symptoms.
- Half of the attackers had interests in violence topics.
- All attackers experienced social stressors involving their relationships with peers and/or romantic partners.
- Nearly every attacker experienced negative home life factors.

#### KEY FINDINGS

U.S. Secret Service, “Protecting America’s Schools,” Nov. 2019

- Most attackers were victims of bullying, which was often observed by others.
- Most attackers had a history of school disciplinary actions, and many had prior contact with law enforcement.
- All attackers exhibited concerning behaviors. Most elicited concern from others, and most communicated their intent to attack.

“We cannot abandon our kids to that darkness, because we have seen how it can reach out to engulf the rest of us. We’ve got to pull them back into the light — for their sake and our own.”

— Ohio Attorney General  
Dave Yost

### Speakers

#### MARK PORTER, Director of Law Enforcement Operations, Ohio Attorney General’s Office

“School resource officers are in an ideal position to review these publications and share this information with other members on the threat assessment team — in fact, they should share it with school staff, their school board members, as well as parents.”

#### PAOLO DEMARIA, Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction

“The children of this state are our most precious possession and asset. They’re our future, and we want to create the conditions for them to be successful. And part of that is ensuring their safety.”

#### MAX SCHACHTER, Founder, Safe Schools For Alex

“Ohio is prioritizing the safety and security of its students and its teachers by doing this. ... Every parent in the state will be eternally grateful.”

#### DAVE YOST, Ohio Attorney General

“What you have learned in this series of videos has provided you with tools you can use to improve the safety and health of your school and your community.”





**DAVE YOST**  
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

# **Ohio School Threat Assessment Training**

## **Reference Guide**

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For more information about this  
report, please contact:

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30 E. Broad St., 17th Floor  
Columbus, OH 43215**

**800-282-0515**

**[www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov](http://www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov)**

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