

**VIOLENCE
THREAT
RISK
ASSESSMENT**

**ELK
ISLAND
VTRA PROTOCOL**

**WORKING TOGETHER TO
PROTECT OUR CHILDREN AND
KEEP OUR COMMUNITIES SAFE**

Strathcona County | Fort Saskatchewan | Lamont County | Vegreville

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Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response
Eastern Edge Regional Collaborative Service Delivery
Elk Island Catholic Schools
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Family and Community Support Services, Lamont County Region
Family and Community Support Services, Vegreville and District
Fort Saskatchewan Family and Community Support Services
Fort Saskatchewan RCMP
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Ministry of Children's Services, North Central Region
New Horizons School
Primary Care Network, Sherwood Park Strathcona County
Strathcona County Family and Community Services
Strathcona County RCMP
Vegreville RCMP

Additional community partners will be engaged as broader community training occurs and the protocol expands to other communities and agencies.

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► Introduction

The following document is prepared as a support to:

- ensure a co-ordinated approach between partner agencies.
- promote dialogue and information-sharing, enhance effective relationships and create shared understandings between the partner agencies.

The document outlines the common principles, varied resources and certain obligations and procedures required by provincial and federal legislation—for example the Alberta Human Rights Act, the Children First Act, the Child Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the School Act, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy, the Limitations Act and the Health Information Act.

About the Violence Threat Risk Assessment Model

The Elk Island Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) Protocol is based on the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (CCTATR) model of VTRA. The work of the CCTATR reflects scientific research conducted by a number of disciplines including medical and mental health professionals, law enforcement and specialists in the field of threat management.

VTRA promotes a common language and understanding of threat assessment, makes use of the expertise of community partners and encourages a multidisciplinary approach to violence prevention. Trained VTRA teams work from the perspective serious violence is an evolutionary process and therefore no one just snaps. Pre-incident data is often available to help identify and prevent serious violence (see pg. 16, “Appendix A: Key Concepts and Definitions”).

The VTRA process involves:

- immediate response
- data collection
- initial assessment
- comprehensive risk assessment
- intervention by a multidisciplinary team
- longer-term treatment planning
- followup support

Guiding Principles

Protocol partners are guided by the following principles:

- We have a shared obligation to take active steps to reduce violence in schools and in communities. All partners will undertake to follow the protocol.
- We will work in ways that promote welcoming, caring, respectful and safe schools and neighbourhoods.
- We will strive to create working relationships built on mutual respect and trust.
- We will work together for the benefit of students and their parents or caregivers.
- We will recognize each student has unique strengths and needs, and will involve students and their families in planning services and supports.
- We will collect information, analyze data and consult with local partners and service providers to determine an appropriate response and support plan.

Need for Training

The VTRA Protocol is not a substitute for training in the field of violence threat risk assessment. Instead, it’s intended to be used by multidisciplinary teams trained in the theory and practice of child and youth violence threat risk assessment—such as Level 1 VTRA. *NOTE:* CCTATR reviews specific training needs on an annual basis.

VISION

Violence prevention is a community responsibility, where all community partners work together to promote and maintain safety. All partners are accountable to the protocol’s purpose and have a shared obligation to actively take steps to prevent traumatic events in schools and neighbourhoods.

MISSION

All partner organizations commit to responding to any form of violence or threat of violence that impacts the quality of life for children and youth. The partners agree to collaborate for the common goal of reducing violence and promoting individual, school and community safety. To achieve this, all partners must use a proactive risk assessment and multidisciplinary intervention approach, share information and provide consultation.

► VTRA Team Membership

All partners will take actions seen as necessary to ensure immediate risk reduction, without delay, regardless of the involvement or availability of other community partners.

Initial VTRA Response Team

- VTRA-trained RCMP member (school resource officer)
- school administration (principal, assistant principal)
- counselling member (school counsellor, psychologist, therapist, family-school liaison)
- school division VTRA contact

Additional VTRA Team Members

- Children's Services
- Alberta Health Services: Addiction and Mental Health
- Family and Community Services
- Additional community members may be added, if available, at the discretion of the VTRA team (family physician, therapist, community agencies and supports)

► When to Activate the VTRA Protocol

Any VTRA-trained partner agency can activate the VTRA protocol at any time. Sometimes it's difficult to determine whether or not to activate a formal VTRA process. The following guidelines are intended to help protocol partners decide if a formal VTRA is needed. It's important to carefully consider each individual incident to ensure the most appropriate response.

Immediate Risk Situations

When immediate risk to safety is identified, call 911 and implement school lockdown procedures immediately (for example, lethal weapons, dangerous person inside or on periphery of the building or active shooter scenarios). These are emergency situations requiring immediate police intervention and protection. The Stage 1 VTRA the threat and risk assessment—should not be initiated until the situation is stabilized.

High-Risk Behaviours: Automatic Stage 1 VTRA activation

Formal categories for VTRA Protocol activation include, but are not limited to:

- serious violence or violence with the intent to harm or kill another person

- verbal or written threats to seriously harm or kill others or cause significant property damage (clear, direct, plausible)
- internet, website and social media threats to seriously harm others
- possession of weapons—including replicas
- bomb threats—making and detonating explosive devices
- fire setting
- sexual intimidation or assault
- extreme cases of bullying and harassment
- gang-related intimidation and violence
- rehearsal behaviours or evidence of planning
- hate incidents motivated by factors such as race, culture, religion or sexual orientation

Suicide as a Special Consideration

When site-specific professionals are dealing with a situation where an individual is of concern because of suicidal ideation they should follow their existing protocols for suicide risk assessment. Most protocol partners have personnel who are trained in suicide risk assessment and intervention. Therefore, as a standard, it isn't a category for VTRA Protocol activation.

However, those trained in suicide risk assessment should be VTRA trained and be open to the possibility that the individual being assessed may be "fluid" (movement between the homicidal and suicidal domains). Additionally, when there is evidence of a suicide pact or a "puppet-master" peer dynamic (someone in the background trying to drive the person to kill themselves), the VTRA Protocol should be activated. Therefore, the VTRA Protocol should only be used as part of a suicidal ideation case when there is evidence of:

- fluidity
- suicide pact
- conspiracy of two or more (for example, a "puppet master")
- multiple suicides in quick succession in a community

Non-Work-Hour Cases

If information is received by a VTRA member regarding serious violence, weapons possession or a threat that is clear, direct and plausible during non-work hours for protocol partners, police will be called. Steps will also be taken to assess the person of concern and the target(s) will be notified and protected as required. The site-specific VTRA team members and police will determine if team members need to assist beyond regular work hours or if the non-police aspect of the case can wait until regular work hours.

However, the VTRA team will be activated when a case is deemed high risk. During this process, open communication between site-specific VTRA leads and police is essential. Equally important, is the sharing of information between patrol or general-duty police officers and specialized police units such as mobile crisis units and school resource officers. In many cases, evening or weekend incidents continue to escalate into the workplace, school and community. Activating the VTRA team during non-work hours has proven especially useful in cases dealing with gangs, relational violence, family violence, sporting-event retaliations, and/or weekend-party retaliations.

Worrisome Behaviours

Worrisome behaviours are those behaviours that cause concern for members of the school or community and may indicate a student is moving towards the risk of serious violent behaviour. Often, worrisome behaviours are grey-area cases that may or may not result in the activation of the VTRA Protocol.

Worrisome behaviours include, but aren't limited to, the following:

- writing stories, journal entries and blog posts that contain violent content
- social media messaging
- drawing pictures of a violent nature
- making vague threatening statements
- unusual interest in fire
- significant change in anti-social behaviours—a change in baseline

In these cases, the VTRA team is not automatically activated. However, these warning signs should not be ignored. The primary standard for assessing these cases: when they become closer to reality, the greater the concern. In other words, when a person of concern draws mythical creatures engaging in scenes of brutal violence we do not assume the author poses a risk, as mythical creatures are not real. However, a picture depicting a realistic violent act with details that parallel real life is worrisome.

In many cases, following up on worrisome behaviours results in good early intervention measures. There are also cases where a little data can lead to a lot and what seems like a minor case can quickly evolve to the formal activation of the VTRA team. If further data is obtained suggesting the person was violent, uttered threats or is in possession of a weapon the VTRA Protocol should be activated to investigate the threat.

Un-authored Threats

Un-authored threats are typically threats to commit a violent act against an individual(s), specific group or site—such as a school. These may be found written on bathroom walls or stalls, spray painted on the side of schools, posted on the Internet or as unsigned notes left in a conspicuous place, such as on a teacher's desk.

In the field of school-based violence threat and risk assessment, the lack of ownership of the threat generally denotes a lack of commitment. Nevertheless, the school team should attempt to identify the threat maker and assess the level of risk. It's also important to minimize the crisis or traumatic impact on others.

VTRA teams should consider the following in determining the initial level of risk based on the current data:

- What is the "language of commitment?"
- How much detail is included—the location where the violence is to occur, specific target(s), date and time the violence is to occur, justification?
- What is the method of delivery for the threat—who found or received the threat and when and where was it received?
- Is the threat clear, direct and plausible?

In many cases, the author is never found but steps can be taken to identify who the author is:

- handwriting analysis
- word usage—phrases and expressions that may be unique to a particular person or group
- spelling—errors or modifications unique to an individual or group
- font and writing style

Students with Diverse Learning Needs and VTRA

The VTRA protocol will not necessarily be activated when students with diverse learning needs engage in threat making or aggressive behaviours typical to their baseline. In other words, if the person's conduct is consistent with their diagnosis or how they're known to typically present, then a VTRA response isn't required.

However, if the student with diverse needs moves beyond their typical baseline—either a single incident or a slow-and-steady increase—and is engaged in high-risk behaviour it would warrant a VTRA response.

The role of the VTRA team is to determine why there was an increase in the baseline behaviour and whether the student poses a risk to self or others. The process of

data collection and assessment is not modified other than to ensure the appropriate interviewing strategies are used for the student with diverse needs. Staff members from the school and division levels responsible for program planning and service delivery must consult to the VTRA teams in these cases.

As a note of caution, sometimes school and community members may under react to a serious threat posed by a student with diverse needs. They may assume all of the behaviours are a result of their functional impairment rather than considering a student with diverse needs can move along “the pathway to justification” as well.

Early Elementary Aged Children and VTRA

When younger students engage in violent or threat related behaviour, developmental and exceptionality issues need to be taken into consideration. Generally speaking, most threat-related behaviour exhibited by elementary-aged students falls into the category of “worrisome behaviours.” However, just because a student is elementary age doesn’t mean they can’t pose a risk. If high-risk behaviours are identified, a VTRA protocol should be activated.

► VTRA Reminders

VTRA Trumps Suspension

In most cases, unless the individual of concern already poses an imminent or obvious safety concern such as brandishing a weapon, a Stage 1 VTRA should occur before suspension is considered.

A poorly timed out-of-school suspension can be a risky response as the suspension is often viewed by a high-risk student as the last straw. In fact, it’s during the suspension many threat makers decide to finalize a plan to terrorize a school or attack a specific target, which can include suicidal or homicidal acts. The suspension does not cause the violence to occur but can create the necessary context for a student who is already struggling with suicidal or homicidal ideation to take the final step, from planning to taking action.

If suspension is necessary, a critical question beyond “when to suspend?” is “where to suspend?” Consider an in-school suspension if possible. The isolation and disconnection felt by high-risk students during an out-of-school suspension may be exacerbated if steps are not taken to keep the student connected with healthy adult supports.

VTRA Is Not a Disciplinary Measure

In the past, there have been VTRA trained professionals who have failed to activate the VTRA Protocol for legitimate cases and instead threaten to activate a VTRA if the behaviour continues. It’s not appropriate for an administrator to tell a student of concern “if you engage in similar behaviour again, a threat assessment will be conducted.” Doing this is contrary to the purpose of VTRA and a dangerous unidimensional practice.

By doing so, the professional, intended or not, has essentially done a VTRA on their own and determined the person doesn’t pose a risk. The purpose of a VTRA is to determine the plausibility of risk, not to be a punitive measure.

VTRA and Criminal Charges

In cases of violence or criminal threats, the RCMP member assigned to the VTRA team has the first call as to whether charges will be laid. If charges aren’t laid, the officer will continue with the initial VTRA response team. In many cases, when charges are laid, the VTRA police member will refer the case to a general-duty officer to investigate the case and will continue to participate as the VTRA member. If a police investigation is being conducted, it doesn’t prevent the remaining VTRA members from continuing with data collection relative to the threat assessment. The members should continue to obtain a history of prior target selection, the site selection and any shifts in baseline behaviours.

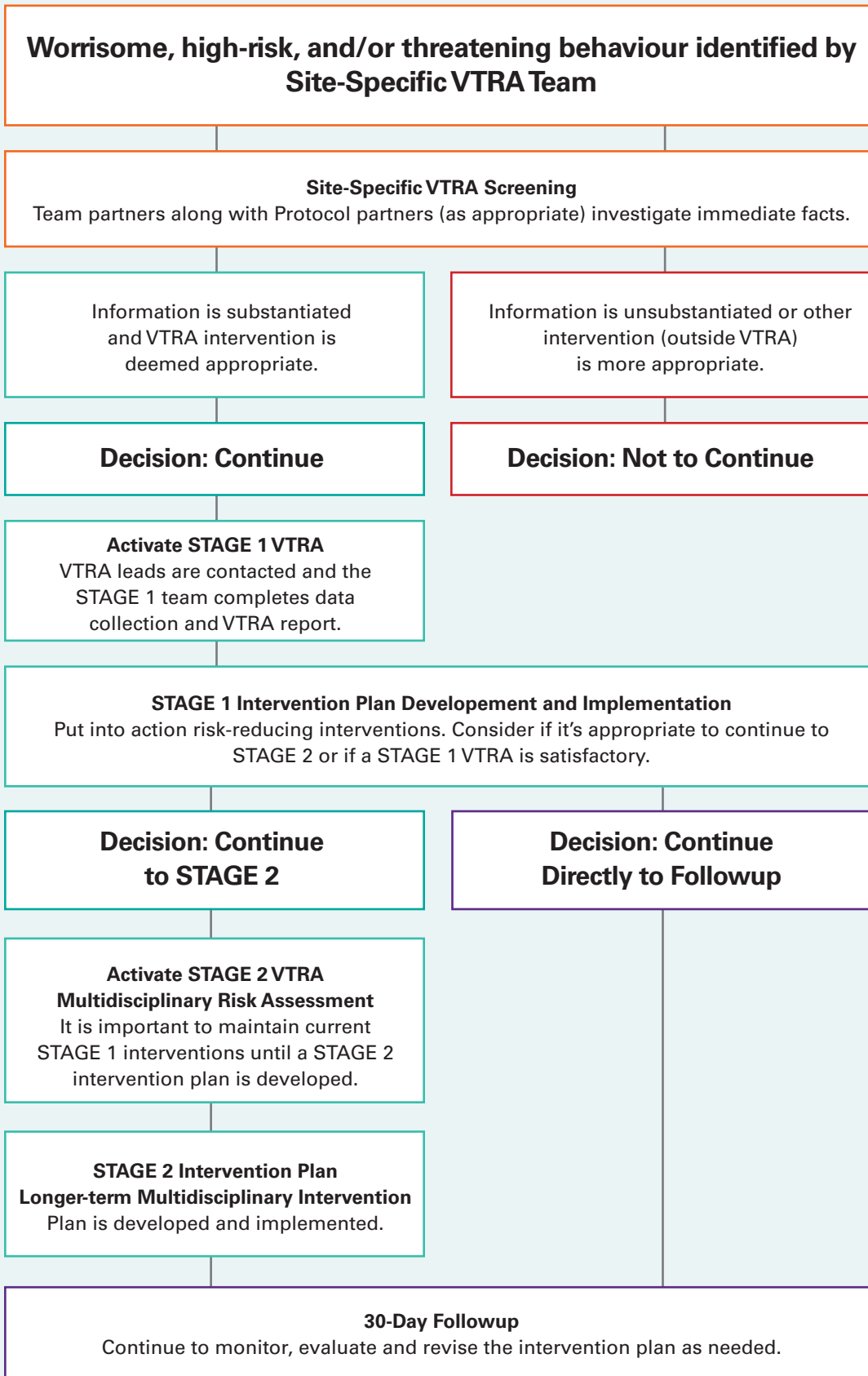
Good communication between police and the VTRA team is important. It helps ensure the investigation or prosecution isn’t compromised and that unnecessary strain is not placed on the victim. Collaboration with VTRA members is ongoing, notwithstanding the fact each team member has his or her own jurisdiction.

HOW TO ACTIVATE A VTRA PROTOCOL

Steps in the VTRA Process

Any school or community partner who determines the need to activate the VTRA protocol will notify either the school administrator or agency VTRA lead. An updated contact list of protocol partners is provided annually (see pg. 18, “Appendix B: School Administrator’s Guide” and pg. 19, “Appendix C: Community Response Guide”).

VTRA RESPONSE FLOW-CHART



WHAT TO DO VTRA PROCEDURES

STAGE 1

The Stage 1 process occurs primarily at the school level and is managed by the initial VTRA response team. A school administrator or school division VTRA lead will typically lead the process, supported by the VTRA-trained RCMP member and the counselling team member (see pg. 26, “Appendix D: Stage 1 Report Form,” for a step-by-step guide on the VTRA process).

Stage 1 VTRA tasks include:

1. conduct data collection and consolidation
2. determine immediate risk-reducing interventions
3. triage the remaining Stage 1 risk enhancers
4. develop Stage 1 data-driven intervention plan
5. decide if Stage 2 VTRA is required

The primary purpose of Stage 1 VTRA is to:

- determine if the threat maker poses a risk to the target being threatened;
- determine if the threat maker poses a risk of violence in general—overall level of risk; and
- plan immediate interventions for any risk enhancers identified.

REMEMBER

- It's not a VTRA if there is imminent danger or the threat is time sensitive. Call 911.
- If needed, implement a lockdown as per the school's procedures.
- Ensure you know the whereabouts of the threat maker(s) and target(s). If necessary, appropriately monitor or detain the student(s) of concern until the VTRA police member is present. Do not allow student(s) of interest access to coats, backpacks, desks, lockers or cell phones.

Mitigating Risk

It's essential to determine if the threat maker has immediate access to the means to carry out a threat such as a knife or gun. The RCMP will determine if there is a relevant history of weapons possession, use or violence. Sometimes, there is evidence of planning or weapons in the threat maker's locker at school, in their bedroom at home or both.

- The school owns the locker dynamic and must be attended to in each incident—the school administration searches the student's locker, backpack, desk, cell phone and car.
- The RCMP owns the bedroom dynamic and will take the lead to determine the level of search required. It's important to examine the student's bedroom and any other personal spaces such as the individual's internet history or a backyard fort.

Gathering Additional Data

Once assembled, the initial VTRA response team needs to determine a plan of action including identifying sources of data and delegating roles, for example; interviewing, locker check, background checks and notifying parents.

THERE ARE THREE PRIMARY HYPOTHESES IN VTRA THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED THROUGHOUT THE DATA-COLLECTION PROCESS:

1. **Is it a conscious or unconscious cry for help?**
2. **Is it a conspiracy of two or more? In other words, who else knows about it and who is involved?**
3. **Is there evidence of fluidity—the flow between suicidal and homicidal thoughts or actions?**

Immediate data may be obtained from multiple sources including interviews and hard data (see pg. 26, "Appendix D: Stage 1 Report Form").

Interviewees should include:

- the person(s) who has raised the concern;
- potential target(s) or victim(s);
- witnesses;
- teachers and other school staff as applicable such as educational assistants, family-school liaison worker, bus driver and coach;
- peers; and
- parents or caregivers—all legal guardians should be contacted.

Other sources of data should include:

- partner agency background checks including RCMP, mental health agencies, Children's Services, Family and Community Services
- recent school work and materials
- diaries and notebooks
- internet history
- school records such as report cards, support plans, attendance, assessments and evaluations
- previous schools attended, if applicable

Interviewing the Threat Maker

When possible, interview the threat maker(s) or student(s) of concern after the initial data is collected—locker check, interviewing the person who reported the threat, interviewing potential targets or witnesses and background checks with RCMP and relevant partners. These will provide the interviewers with the comprehensive data needed to develop case-specific hypotheses and verbatim questions that can be asked in a strategic VTRA interview.

No more than two people should be present when interviewing the threat maker—one of whom must be a clinician or counselling team member.

It's important to consider and explore all relevant aspects of the threat maker's life using the Stage 1 Report Form (see pg. 26, "Appendix D"). The semi-structured interview form serves as a guide during the interview process.

Notifying the Legal Guardians

It is important to contact the parents and guardians of both the threat maker and the target at the earliest opportunity—once the initial data is collected and there is a clear picture of what occurred. The school administrator should check the student's file to verify guardianship and any other legal flags that may relate to the family.

All legal guardians should be contacted. Keep in mind, the information can sometimes leave them feeling fearful or traumatized. Therefore, any notification should be conducted with skill, tact and planning.

For all guardians:

- provide basic information about the incident and reassure steps are being taken to mitigate immediate risk;
- ask for their perspective on the incident; and
- ask about any recent behavioural changes or contextual factors that might be at play with the student.

For the threat maker's guardians:

- explain the VTRA response is not intended to be disciplinary, rather it's a collaborative process to assess risk and ensure safety of all;
- explain the data collection is an important part of the VTRA process and their perspective is integral to developing a plan of support for their child;
- advise them, as per VTRA protocol, the RCMP are informed about the situation and part of the threat-assessment team; and
- schedule a time for them to come in for a meeting—ideally after the initial school-based data collection is completed.

Determining Level of Risk

Following data collection, the VTRA team should come back together to collate data and discuss all relevant information regarding the threat. As a team, complete the Stage 1 Report Form (see pg. 26, "Appendix D").

Using the data gathered, engage in discussions to determine the level of risk. As a team, ask the following questions:

- What extent does the student pose a threat to school safety and student safety?
- Does the student pose a threat to himself, herself or someone outside the school, for example, a family member?

LOW LEVEL OF CONCERN:

Risk to safety is minimal.

- Available information suggests the person is unlikely to carry out the threat or become violent. *NOTE:* Categorization of low risk doesn't imply no risk. Rather, it indicates the individual is at little risk for violence and monitoring the concern is appropriate.
- The threat is vague and indirect.
- Information contained within the threat is inconsistent, implausible, lacks detail or lacks realism.
- The threat is within the general range for typical baseline behaviour for the threat maker.

MEDIUM LEVEL OF CONCERN:

The threat could be carried out, although it may not appear entirely realistic. Violent action is possible

- Threat is more plausible and concrete than a low-level threat. The threat maker is deemed to be at an elevated risk for violence.
- Wording in the threat and information gathered suggests some thought has been given to how the threat will be carried out—for example, a possible place and time.

- There is no clear evidence of planning such as weapon seeking. However, there are reasons to believe the threat is not empty because of verbal remarks or reported history.
- There are moderate or lingering concerns about the student's potential to act violently.
- There is an increase in baseline behaviour.

HIGH LEVEL OF CONCERN:

There appears to be imminent and serious danger to the safety of others.

- The threat is specific and plausible. There is an identified target and the student has the capacity to act out the threat.
- Information suggests concrete were taken towards acting out the threat. For example, the student has acquired a weapon, practiced on a weapon or has had the victim under surveillance.
- Information suggests strong concern about the student's potential to act violently.
- There is a significant increase in baseline behaviour.

Determining Next Steps

With the input of all the school-based VTRA team members, decide on a course of action including identifying the risk-reducing interventions that need to be put into place.

LOW-TO MEDIUM-LEVEL OF CONCERN:

- Create an intervention plan (see pg. 26, "Appendix D").
- The student can likely be managed at school with appropriate monitoring and school-based interventions.
- Contact the school division's VTRA lead to advise of the outcome of the Stage 1 VTRA.

MEDIUM TO HIGH LEVEL OF CONCERN:

- A Stage 2 VTRA is needed.
- It's necessary to involve the school division's VTRA lead and relevant community partners in a multidisciplinary meeting.
- Implement any needed interventions to support the student until the Stage 2 VTRA meeting takes place.

STAGE 2

The focus for Stage 2 VTRA is a comprehensive risk evaluation and intervention planning by a multi-disciplinary team. Members of various partner agencies collaborate with the school team and parents to gain a deeper understanding of the child. The goal is to create a comprehensive intervention plan.

Preparing for a Stage 2 VTRA

- Review the student's record and the data gathered by the initial VTRA response team.
- Consider any family concerns or legal flags that may be present such as consent, guardianship and pending criminal charges.
- Contact parents and guardians to advise them a Stage 2 VTRA is being activated.
 1. Explain the Stage 2 VTRA process indicating the goal is to create an intervention plan to support the student, family and school.
 2. Invite them to attend the multidisciplinary meeting.
 3. Ask if there are additional professional or family supports they would like to have at the meeting such as extended family, private therapist or someone else.
- Determine additional VTRA team members required for the Stage 2 meeting.
 - the Children's Services VTRA contact
 - the AHS Mental Health VTRA contact
 - the Family and Community Services VTRA contact
 - If appropriate, additional members of the community may be added such as a family physician, private therapist, a community agency or another support person.
- Book a date and location for the Stage 2 meeting and ensure all participants are aware.
- Share any necessary VTRA-related documents with team members, which should be reviewed prior to the meeting.
- Prepare for the meeting by completing the preliminary information on the Stage 2 Report Form (see pg. 32, "Appendix E") and (see pg. 35, "Appendix F").

Stage 2 VTRA Meeting: A step-by-step guide

- The school division VTRA lead typically chairs the Stage 2 VTRA meeting.
- Begin with a welcome and introductions with the chair noting attendees or circulating attendance sheet.
- Indicate the purpose of the meeting is; "to gain a deeper understanding of the student and the circumstances relating to the incident to create a comprehensive intervention plan that will support the student, family and school."
- Explain how open conversation provides the best information and understanding. Indicate the team is seeking multiple perspectives on the student and many questions will be asked about home and school.
- Using the Stage 2 Report Form guide (see pg. 32, "Appendix E"), review the necessary details regarding the incident and gather any additional information.
- Review the Intervention Planning Worksheet (see pg. 35, "Appendix F") and explore the intervention options—both school-based and external supports.
- Assign the lead professional or agency for each risk enhancer identified, to collectively address all areas of concerns identified during the Stage 2 VTRA.
- After the intervention plan is identified, review the level of risk and determine, as a group, whether the identified interventions are sufficient.
- Determine who will followup with the family and agencies regarding the implementation of supports and monitor if interventions are successful—typically done by a school staff member.

Intervention Followup Meeting

- The school division VTRA lead is responsible for scheduling a brief followup meeting within four weeks to eight weeks of the Stage 2 VTRA meeting—it usually takes place at the school.
- The purpose of the followup meeting is to review the intervention plan, reassess the level of risk and determine whether additional supports are needed.
- If necessary, make a plan for future followup meetings.



► Crisis and Trauma Management

Supporting Those Who May Be Impacted

The school administrator and the division VTRA lead are responsible for ensuring any possible victims of the threat are assessed and services are provided as necessary. The circumstances of threat—directed towards one or more individuals, an entire class or the school population—will dictate how far reaching the intervention needs to be. The division VTRA lead, in consultation with the school administration, should determine if crisis counselling or trauma followup is needed to re-establish calm.

There may be cases where the recipient of the threat was also engaged in high-risk behaviours that helped lead to the threat(s). In those situations, the recipient of the threat(s) may also need to be assessed using the VTRA model. Whether the threat is high risk or not, if the school and community are responding traumatically it's appropriate to move into a crisis-response mode following the appropriate school or agency procedures.

Notifying Staff, Students and Families

If the language of a threat is low risk and only a few people are aware of the incident, there is usually no need to notify the students, staff and parents. In some schools and communities, the unnecessary communication of a threat-related incident will cause more damage than good.

If the language of the threat is low risk but several people are aware of the incident and it appears to be elevating the anxiety of people at the school, all students, staff and parents should be notified. If the threat includes names of particular targets, those who are being targeted must be notified. In the case of student targets, parents or caregivers must be notified pending any unique circumstances. If the case is only known to a few, and the threat selection is clear and specific, the rest of the students and staff should only be notified if they are directly related to the case.

If the threat is deemed moderate to high risk and several students and staff members outside of the target group are aware, all students, staff and parents should be notified. The communication should be in general terms indicating an incident is under investigation and the school is following the RCMP's lead. Additionally, assure everyone all students and staff are safe and the situation is being managed collaboratively as part of the multidisciplinary VTRA protocol. The information shared within a school community is determined by the superintendent. Each school or agency should follow that organization's communications protocol.

► Communications and Documentation

Welcoming, caring, respectful and safe schools are schools promoting open communication in a culture of information sharing and reporting of concerns. Throughout the entire school community, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students and parents must be encouraged and supported to openly voice concerns about school safety.

Responsible Reporting

Any person in a school community having knowledge of, or reasonable grounds to believe there is, a potential of high-risk student behaviour should promptly report the information to the school principal or another staff member. Actively teach students seeking adult support for worrisome behaviour is not "ratting" or "snitching." Rather, it's a social responsibility for the well-being of all. School staff need to actively counter the code of silence.

Fair Notice

The Community Violence Threat Risk Assessment Protocol partners are committed to keeping our schools and community safe for all people. As a result, schools and partner community agencies respond to youth behaviours that pose a potential risk to other members of the community.

It's the responsibility of each agency to communicate fair notice as appropriate for their site. School divisions provide fair-notice letters or post fair-notice information on their school websites (see pg. 36, "Appendix G: Fair Notice Letter").

Communicating with the Media

When a case draws, or has the potential to draw, high-profile media attention formal communication should be collaborative between the school division and the RCMP. The release of information should take into consideration those statutes guiding the release of information. Additionally, timing and content of the release must take into account police investigations so as not to jeopardize the investigation or the safety of any individuals. Additionally, all media releases need to be prepared collaboratively and released jointly with the agency involved and the RCMP.

Again schools and agencies should follow it's organization's communication procedures. The VTRA team or staff members should not independently communicate with the media. Any communication that does take place with the media should model calmness and leadership.

Documentation

Each protocol partner is responsible for documenting and storing information as required by the agency or by law. However, the school division is responsible for storing the relevant VTRA documentation, including the VTRA Stage 1 Report Form and accompanying intervention plans. The documentation is highly confidential and not to be included in the student record. Rather, VTRA documentation is to be stored separately as a critical-incident file according to the school division's student records policy and procedures. A brief form letter needs to be placed in the student record indicating a VTRA was activated with information identifying who to contact if additional details are needed. School divisions will use the VTRA Incident Report to document this information (see pg. 37, "Appendix H"). Future sharing of information contained in documents about previous VTRA incidents should balance the individual's rights to privacy with the safety and well-being of the child and others.

▶ Consent and Information Sharing

The partners collaborating on the Elk Island Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) Protocol are committed to the sharing of relevant information to the extent authorized by law. All participants in the VTRA process are bound by the legislation and policies that guide their agency or organization regarding confidentiality and information sharing. It is their responsibility to know the legislation, take it into account and guide actions accordingly.

Section 126(6) of the Youth Criminal Justice Act enables information in a Youth Criminal Justice Act record to be shared, within the access period, with any professional or other person engaged in the supervision or care of a young person to document this information—including the representative of any school board or school, or any other educational or training institution in limited circumstances. Information may be shared to ensure the safety of staff and students, to facilitate rehabilitation of the young person to ensure compliance with a youth-justice court order and any order of the provincial director—respecting reintegration leave. Such sharing of information does not require the young person's consent.

In addition, the recently proclaimed Children First Act (2014) is based on the philosophy programs and services supporting children are most effective when provided through a collaborative and multi-disciplinary approach. Such collaboration can only be effective when appropriate information sharing occurs between individuals and organizations involved in planning or providing programs and services for children. The philosophy is critical to ensuring successful outcomes for children and their families.

The Children First Act allows for greater information sharing among government departments, law-enforcement and other service providers when dealing with children. It changes the test within the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and Health Information Act by changing imminent danger to risk of harm to the health or safety of a minor when a decision regarding information sharing is being made. The Act allows for information sharing among parents and service providers for the purpose of providing services or benefits to the child in the best interests of the child. In addition, the Act provides liability protection in legislation for frontline workers who act in good faith and within the scope of their positions. For more information about this and the Health Information Act, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act,

Personal Information Protection Act and Children First Act visit www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/information-sharing-decision-tree.pdf.

► Annual Tasks and Responsibilities

All organizations that intend to be formal protocol partners must commit to being trained in Level 1 VTRA at the minimum, and commit to active participation in relevant cases when the protocol is formally activated. Each protocol partner is responsible for communication of VTRA practices within their own organization.

The formal VTRA Steering Committee should meet at least once a year to review the successes and challenges of the VTRA collaboration. Statistics should be presented by each partner on how many VTRAs they have participated in with a minimum data set of:

- age
- gender
- category for action resulting in the VTRA
- evidence of fluidity
- level of risk at Stage 1
- level of risk at Stage 2

VTRA team leads must be designated from each partner organization—these leads will comprise the VTRA sub-committee, which is the backbone of the community VTRA Protocol. The sub-committee should meet at least three times a year to:

- update the list of protocol partner contacts;
- review upcoming training needs at all school sites and agencies;
- review VTRA activities and statistics for the year;
- review any changes to legislation that could impact the protocol;
- review the VTRA Protocol to ensure relevancy;
- review the VTRA practice by presenting case studies highlighting successes, challenges and lessons learned; and
- any other items brought forward by protocol partners.

The formal VTRA Steering Committee should be brought back together to review and re-sign the protocol every three years, or more often if necessary. By doing so, it provides an opportunity to make revisions to the protocol and allow new partner organizations to sign on to the protocol.





APPENDIXES

▶ Key Concepts and Definitions

Attack-Related Behaviours

Behaviours that provide evidence the threat maker has engaged in behaviours consistent with their threat.

Baseline

An individual's characteristic level of functioning from, which one can assess changes in his or her behaviour or mood.

Behaviour Intervention Plan

A plan that outlines the supports and interventions required by a student having behaviour challenges. It includes but is not limited to: behaviour goals/skills, academic supports required, targeted skill development, replacement behaviours, reinforcers and consequences, and progress monitoring.

Child/Youth

All children and youth under the age of 18.

Community Threat Assessment Team

A multi-agency team of professionals trained in threat assessment and in the use of this protocol.

Empty Vessel

Metaphor to describe the dramatic lack of connection that has existed between almost all school shooters and a healthy mature adult and their lack of clear identity, place and purpose. Their parental and other adult relationships have often been marked by extremes on a continuum from neglect to over-involvement—some experiencing both extremes at different times and other experiencing predominantly one or the other.

Fluidity

Changing back and forth between suicide ideation and homicidal ideation, and often with increasing rapidity as one becomes closer to a violent act.

High-Risk Behaviours

Defined as behaviours that express intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. High-risk behaviours include but aren't limited to: interest in violent content, unusual interest in fire and fire setting, escalation of physical aggression, significant change in anti-social behaviour, unusual interest in or possession of a weapon or replica of a weapon, bomb threat, internet threat to kill or injure self or others.

Do not be deceived when traditional risk behaviours do not exist. There is no profile or checklist for the high-risk child/youth. Some child/youth who actually pose a threat display few traits of the traditional high-risk child/youth. Identify the possibility and degree of fluidity between homicidal and suicidal domains. This is critical to the development of a response to the incident, including the creation of a child/youth support plan.

Justification Process

The process by which an individual rationalizes the purpose and intent of violence. This includes the fact, circumstance, grounds for action, defence or complaints the potential offender seeks or is given the means to justify the intended violence.

Language of Commitment

Commitment is the degree of resolve an individual has to carry out a violent act. When assessing a threat, it's important to pay attention to the language that is used. Specific language suggests greater degree of commitment. For example; date, time and location the violence is to occur. Words such as "soon" or "might" are examples of language lacking commitment.

Plausibility

Plausibility is defined as seeming likely to be true. For example, an individual threatening to call down a Martian UFO to vaporize the school is not a plausible threat. An elementary student threatening to drive a Sherman tank through the school may be clear and direct but not plausible. A student threatening another student to beat their brains with a lead pipe is plausible.

Plausibility-Baseline-Attack Related Behaviours (PBAs)

Plausibility is the single most important variable in determining whether or not verbal or written threats should be taken seriously enough to screen the case for a VTRA. Baseline Behaviour is the single most important variable in the field of VTRA in determining if the threat maker, or person of concern, poses a risk to act out violently. This is because serious violence is an evolutionary process and any significant increase or shift in baseline denotes evolution. Attack-Related Behaviours are important questions in the VTRA Report Form because they examine evidence that the threat maker has engaged in behaviours consistent with their threat.

Risk Assessment

The process of determining if a child/youth of concern may pose a risk to some unknown target or targets at some unknown period in time.

Categories of Risk:

LOW LEVEL OF CONCERN

- Risk to the target(s), students, staff and school safety is minimal.
- Within the general range for typical baseline behaviour for the student in question.
- Low risk does not imply “no risk” but indicates the individual is at little risk for violence.
- Data collected suggests threat is vague, indirect, implausible, or lacking in detail or realism.
- Monitoring of the matter may be appropriate.

MEDIUM LEVEL OF CONCERN

- Risk to the target(s), students, staff and school safety is credible, violent action is possible.
- The threat could be carried out, although it may not appear entirely realistic. Violent action is possible.
- Increase in baseline behaviour.
- Wording in the threat and information gathered suggests that some thought has been given to how the threat will be carried out—for example a possible place and time.
- No clear indication that the student of concern has taken preparatory steps such as weapon seeking, although there may be an ambiguous or inconclusive references pointing to the possibility. There may be a specific statement seeking to convey the threat is not empty: “I’m serious”
- The individual is at an elevated risk for violence, and those measures currently in place or further measures, including monitoring, are required in an effort to manage the individual’s future risk.

HIGH LEVEL OF CONCERN

- Risk to the target(s), students, staff and school safety is specific and plausible; the student or situation of concern appears to pose an imminent and serious danger to the safety of others.
- Significant increase in baseline behaviour.
- There is an identified target and the student has the capacity to act on the threat.
- Information suggests concrete steps have been taken towards acting on the threat.
- Information suggests strong concern about the student’s potential to act violently.
- Immediate intervention is required to prevent an act of violence from occurring.

NOTE: Sources for the above categorizations represent the work of the FBI and the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response.

Threat

Defined as any expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. Threats may be spoken; written; drawn; posted on the internet such as Facebook, SnapChat, Twitter, Instagram and AskFM; or made by gesture only. Threats may be direct, indirect, conditional or veiled.

Threat Assessment

The process of determining if a threat maker actually poses a risk to the target(s) being threatened.

Threat-Making Behaviours

Any action that an individual, who in any manner knowingly utters, conveys or causes any person to receive a threat.

Violence

Violence is a continuing process of thoughts and behaviours dependent on the interaction between a person who is inclined to violence; a stimulus that causes the violence; and a setting that allows for violence or does nothing to prevent a violent act from occurring. Violence is dynamic and multidimensional. It is a process that is developed over time.

Worrisome Behaviour

Behaviours that cause concern and may indicate a child/youth is moving towards a greater risk of violent behaviour. Worrisome behaviours include, but are not limited to, drawing pictures that contain violence, stories and journal writings that contain violence and making vague or generalized statements about violence towards others that don’t constitute a threat. Worrisome behaviours may be an early warning sign of the development of more serious high-risk behaviours. All worrisome behaviours should be addressed.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR'S GUIDE

STEPS	ACTION	
1	Secure safety and address any immediate risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriately monitor and/or detain the student(s) of concern until the police member of the team is present. • Ensure the student(s) of concern does not have access to weapons— do not allow access to locker, backpack, coat, or cell phone.
2	Check locker, backpacks, desk, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow school division procedures to search the threat maker's backpack, locker, desk, gym locker and other belongings. • Take photographs or copies of anything of concern found.
3	Contact police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call the trained VTRA police member (SRO) and share initial data. • SRO will determine if a history of weapons possession, use or violence is noted in police accessible records.
4	Contact school division VTRA lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the school division VTRA lead to advise of Stage 1 VTRA activation. He or she will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · provide consultation to the school team regarding how to proceed; · if needed, dispatch a member of central office VTRA team to assist; · help with conducting protocol partner background checks; and · ensure the superintendent is informed.
5	Determine interview plan and begin data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before beginning interviews, the VTRA team meets to determine a strategic plan for data collection (see pg. 20, "Appendix D: Stage 1 Report Form"). • Determine who will interview sources of data including all participants directly and indirectly involved. • Determine who will examine hard data relevant to the case such as school records, internet history and surveillance footage.
6	Clinician led interview with threat maker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The clinical member uses the Stage 1 Report Form as an interview guide. • No more than two people should be present when interviewing the threat maker and one must be a clinical member.
7	Parent notification and interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once basic facts are established, notify guardians of both the threat maker(s) and target(s) at the earliest opportunity. • Interview parents or guardians as part of the data collection process. The SRO takes the lead on inquiring about the "bedroom dynamic"
8	Stage 1 meeting review data and determine level of risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the Stage 1 Report Form as a guide, VTRA team members come back together to review all information collected. • As a team, determine the level of risk and record on the Stage 1 Report Form.
9	Decide on course of action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a team, come up with a Stage 1 Intervention Plan with strategies to address all identified risk factors (see pg. 20, "Appendix D: Stage 1 Report Form"). • If the threat is assessed to be moderate to high level of concern, advise the school division VTRA lead that Stage 2 is required.
10	Communication and storage of plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a meeting with threat-maker and guardians to discuss the intervention plan. If moving to Stage 2, this will be a larger meeting with more community partners present. (see pg. 12, "Stage 2"). • Send completed the Stage 1 Report Form and any supporting documentation such as notes and pictures to school division VTRA lead for safe storage.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE GUIDE

STEPS	ACTION
1 Secure safety and address any immediate risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, limit access to possible weapons and monitor the person(s) of concern until police member of the team has been contacted for advice on how to proceed.
2 Inform agency VTRA lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform the organization's VTRA lead of a Stage 1 VTRA activation. He or she will direct the process or provide consultation on how to proceed.
3 Contact police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call a VTRA-trained police member and share initial data. • Police member will determine if there is a history of weapons possession/use or violence noted in police accessible records.
4 If the threat maker is school aged, contact the relevant school division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call the VTRA lead at either Elk Island Public Schools or Elk Island Catholic Schools and share initial data. If unsure of where the child attends school, the VTRA lead can determine whether or not the child is enrolled in their school division.
5 Convene Initial VTRA team and determine plan for data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange a meeting of team members who will be involved in investigating this VTRA case (the investigation may be based out of the agency or school, depending on the situation). • Before beginning interviews, the VTRA team needs to determine a strategic plan for data collection (see pg. 20, "Appendix D: Stage 1 Report Form"). Including who will interview the sources of data (all participants directly and indirectly involved), and who will examine hard data relevant to the case (school records, internet history, surveillance footage, etc).
6 Data collection, including clinician-led interview with threat maker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the Stage 1 Report Form as a guide, conduct interviews and examine other sources of data. <i>NOTE:</i> more than two people should be present when interviewing threat-maker.
7 Parent notification and interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once basic facts are established, notify guardians of both the threat maker(s) and target(s) at the earliest opportunity. • Interview parents or guardians as part of data-collection process. <i>NOTE:</i> Police take the lead on inquiring about the "bedroom dynamic"
8 Stage 1 meeting review data and determine level of risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using Stage 1 report form as a guide, VTRA team members come back together to review all information collected. • As a team, determine the level of risk and record on the Stage 1 Report Form.
9 Decide on course of action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a team, come up with a Stage 1 Intervention Plan with strategies to address all identified risk factors (see pg. 20, "Appendix D: Stage 1 Report Form"). • If the threat is assessed to be moderate to high level of concern, advise agency and school division VTRA lead that Stage 2 is required.
10 Communication and storage of plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a meeting with threat maker and guardians to discuss the intervention plan. If moving to Stage 2, this will be a larger meeting with more community partners present. (see pg. 12, "Stage 2"). • Send completed the Stage 1 Report Form and any supporting documentation such as notes and pictures to school division VTRA lead for safe storage. If the threat maker is not school aged, the team should together determine what protocol partner will store the VTRA documentation.

► Stage 1 Report Form Data Collection and Immediate Risk Reducing Interventions

Screening

Members of a truly functional VTRA team want to consult with each other before determining whether or not to activate the protocol.

Behaviours of a person of concern that pose a threat or risk to self or others can present in a variety of ways. Examples of high-risk behaviours addressed in this protocol include, but are not limited to, the following:

- serious violence or violence with intent to harm or kill;
- indicators of suicidal ideation as it relates to fluidity (both homicidal and suicidal);
- verbal or written threats to kill others (clear, direct, and plausible);
- use of technology to communicate threats to harm/kill others computer and cell phone;
- possession of weapons, including replicas;
- bomb threats (making and/or detonating explosive devices);
- fire setting;
- sexual intimidation or assault;
- ongoing issues with bullying or harassment;
- gang-related intimidation and violence;
- hate incidents motivated by factors such as race, culture, religion or sexual orientation.

When a possible threat is brought to your attention, begin by clarifying the specific details of the incident(s). A good interview with the reporter (the person who reported the threat) lays the foundation for the speed and breadth of initial data collection. Remember, when one person comes on their own to report, they have often been elected by a larger peer group. After obtaining the information they wanted to share, you must ask them: “Who else knows about this? Who else is concerned?”

If the VTRA team is struggling with whether or not to activate the protocol, you already answered your question!
Better safe than sorry.

SERIES ONE QUESTIONS: DETAILS OF THE INCIDENT

Questions to use when interviewing the reporter and witnesses may include the following:

1. Where and when did the incident happen?
2. How did it come to the interviewee’s attention?
3. What was the specific language of the threat, detail of the weapon brandished or gesture made?
4. Was there stated:
 - justification for the threat;
 - means to carry out the threat;
 - consequences weighed out for example, “I don’t care if I live or die”;
 - conditions that could lower the level of risk, for example, “unless you take that post down I will stick my knife in your throat;”?
 - Who was present and under what circumstance did the incident occur?
5. What was the motivation or perceived cause of the incident?
6. What was the response of the target, if present; at the time of the incident? Did he or she add to or detract from the justification process?
7. What was the response of others who were present at the time of the incident? Did they add to or detract from the justification process?

After clarifying the basic details of the incident, consider whether the threat appears to be **clear**, **direct** and **plausible**:

Clear: Words are important—what was actually stated, written and posted? For example, it may be worrisome if someone says: “I swear revenge is coming,” but as a stand-alone statement there is no clarity. In contrast, a statement such as: “I’m gonna get my brother’s knife and stick it in your gut” is clear.

Direct: Was the threat delivered in a way that suggests it was a conscious or unconscious cry for help? Was it delivered with language of commitment, either to the target or to someone who the threat maker believes will communicate to the target? For example, someone privately mumbling: “I swear I’ll kill him” may simply be venting frustration or using that phrase as a colloquialism. In contrast, saying “I swear I’ll kill him” out loud to someone who knows the target is direct.

Plausible: While the first two variables, clear and direct; bring some focus to the case, the single most important variable is plausibility. For example, an elementary student threatening to “drive a Sherman Tank through this school” may be clear and direct but it is certainly not plausible. In contrast, a student threatening to “beat her brains in with a lead pipe” is plausible. If the threat is plausible, a Stage 1 VTRA should be activated.

Stage 1 VTRA Activation and Planning

Steps 1-5 in the School Administrator's Guide and the Community Response Guide

Your first priority is to secure immediate safety. Locate the threat maker and determine whether they need to be immediately secured for example, supervised in the office or taken into police custody or if they can be discreetly monitored by a staff member until a VTRA team member is ready to interview them. Also, make sure to locate the targets and ensure they are safe until a VTRA team member is ready to interview and support them.

Do the initial check to determine if the threat maker has a weapon consistent with their threat or if there is evidence of planning a violent act. This includes checking the locker(s), backpack, desk, vehicle, phone and electronic device. If possible, obtain the threat maker's cell phone and put it in airplane mode to prevent remote clearing of data.

Contact VTRA trained police member and share the initial data. The police will determine if a history of weapons possession, use or violence is noted in police accessible records. Contact the VTRA lead for the school division or agency and advise of Stage 1 activation.

Convene as a VTRA team to determine a strategic plan for the data collection, including who will be responsible for the interviews and who will examine other data relevant to the case. Data may be obtained from multiple sources including:

- reporter(s) (re-interview if necessary)
- target(s)
- witnesses
- teachers and other school staff such as secretaries, educational assistant and bus drivers
- friends, classmates, acquaintances
- current and previous school records (call the previous school if necessary)
- police record check
- partner agency background check for example with Mental Health, Children's Services or FCSS
- parents/caregivers (call both parents)
- locker dynamic, (school administrator takes the lead), check locker(s), desk, backpack, car, binders, recent assignments and journals for any data consistent with the threat-making behaviour
- bedroom dynamic, (police takes the lead), visit the home or question the parents about the student's bedroom to determine if there are weapons or other

data consistent with the threat-making behaviour

- cell phone, internet history and social media activity

When possible, interview the threat maker(s) or student(s) of concern **after** initial data has been collected such as locker check, interviewing the individual who reported the threat and the police member doing an occurrence check for prior police contacts. This will help to avoid the unidimensional assessment and provide the interviewers with data to develop case specific hypotheses and verbatim questions that can be asked in a strategic VTRA interview to test those hypotheses.

There should never be more than two people in the room interviewing the threat maker or student of concern.

Keep in mind there are three primary hypotheses in VTRA:

1. Is it a conscious or unconscious cry for help?
2. Conspiracy of two or more! Who else knows about it? Who else is involved?
3. Is there any evidence of fluidity (movement between suicidal and homicidal ideation)?

Data Collection

Steps 6-7 in the School Administrator's Guide and the Community Response Guide

At this point in the process, VTRA teams typically go their separate ways to conduct assigned interviews and investigate sources of data. Information gathered from all team members should be consolidated into the appropriate sections in the Stage 1 VTRA Data section at the end of this form. It may be helpful to have a copy of this Stage 1 Report Form on a shared electronic drive such as a Google Doc so multiple team members can be entering information into the form simultaneously.

To conduct partner agency background checks, phone the VTRA lead at the agency and share basic data about the situation. The partner will then check to see if the threat maker or person of concern is or was a client and, if so, whether there is relevant information to disclose. Depending on the case, partners may remain as active contributors or consultants for the remaining steps of the Stage 1 process.

The following questions should be used as a guide for the VTRA team members as they conduct the strategic interviews and investigate sources of data. Record relevant information in the corresponding sections within the Stage 1 VTRA Data section at the end of this form.

SERIES TWO QUESTIONS: ATTACK-RELATED BEHAVIOURS

1. Has the student (subject) sought out information consistent with his or her threat making or threat-related behaviour?
2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intentions to attack a target currently or in the past?
3. Has the student (subject) attempted to gain access to weapons or does he or she have access to the weapons she or he has threatened to use?
4. Has the student (subject) developed a plan and how general or specific is it (time, date, identified target selection, site selection, journal of justifications, maps and floor plans)?
5. Has the student (subject) been engaging in suspicious behaviour such as appearing to show an inordinate interest in alarm systems, sprinkler systems, video surveillance in schools or elsewhere, schedules and locations of police or security patrol?
6. Has the student (subject) engaged in rehearsal behaviours including packing or brandishing fake but realistic looking weapons, air rifles, pistols or engaged in fire setting for example, lighting fire to cardboard tubes cut and taped to look like a pipe bomb?
7. Is there any evidence of attack related behaviours in his or her locker, back pack or car trunk at school or bedroom (shed, garage, at home)?
8. Have others been forewarned of a pending attack or told not to come to school because: "something big is going to happen?"

SERIES THREE QUESTIONS: EMPTY VESSEL

1. Does the student (subject) of concern have a healthy relationship with a mature adult?
2. Does the student have inordinate knowledge (versus general knowledge or interest) in violent events, themes or incidents such as prior school-based attacks?
3. How has he or she responded to prior violent incidents (either local situations or national events covered by media)?
4. What is the student "filling him or herself with?" Is there evidence that violent video games, TV programs or music are influencing his or her behaviour? Remember, most are imitators not innovators.
5. What themes are present in the his or her writing, drawings or online posts?

SERIES FOUR QUESTIONS: THREAT MAKER TYPOLOGY

1. Does the threat maker (subject) appear to be more:
 - a) Traditional Predominately Behavioural Type?
 - b) Traditional Predominately Cognitive Type?
 - c) Mixed Type?
 - d) Non-Traditional?
2. Does the threat maker (subject) have a history of violence or threats of violence? If yes, what is his or her past:
 - a) History of Human Target Selection (HTS)
 - b) History of Site Selection (SS)
 - c) Frequency of Violence or Threats (F)
 - d) Intensity of Violence or Threats (I)
 - e) Recency (R)
3. In the case at hand, what is his or her current:
 - a) Human Target Selection (HTS)
 - b) Site Selection (SS)
 - c) Does it denote a significant increase in baseline behaviour?

NOTE: In VTRA, history of violence is a significant risk enhancer but the best predictor of future violent behaviour is an increase or shift in baseline. This may also include an individual who has become more withdrawn or quiet as opposed acting out.
4. Does the subject have a history of depression or suicidal thinking or behaviour?
5. Is there evidence of fluidity in his or her writings, drawings or verbalizations?
6. Does the threat maker (subject) use drugs or alcohol? Is there evidence it is a risk enhancing factor in the case at hand?
7. Is there a mental health diagnosis or evidence of a mental health diagnosis that may be a risk enhancing factor in the case at hand?

SERIES FIVE QUESTIONS: TARGET TYPOLOGY

Remember in some cases the target is higher risk for violence than the threat maker with the most common case being where the threat maker is the victim of bullying and the target is the bully.

1. Does the target have a history of violence or threats of violence?
2. If yes, what is the frequency, intensity and recency of the violence?
3. If yes, what has been their past human target selection and site selection?
4. Is there evidence the target has instigated the current situation?

SERIES SIX QUESTIONS: PEER DYNAMICS

1. Are others involved in the incident that may intentionally or unintentionally be contributing to the justification process?
2. Who is in the threat-maker's peer structure and where does he or she fit in for example, leader, co-leader, follower?
3. Is there a difference between the threat-maker's individual baseline and his or her peer group baseline behaviour?
4. Who is in the target's peer structure and where does he or she fit in for example, leader, co-leader, follower?
5. Is there a peer who could assist with the plan or obtain the weapons necessary for an attack?

SERIES SEVEN QUESTIONS: FAMILY DYNAMICS

1. How many homes does the threat maker (subject) reside in for example, shared custody?
2. Is the subject connected to a healthy mature adult in the home?
3. Who all lives in the family home (full time and part time)?
Has anyone entered or left the home who may be influencing the level of risk?
4. Who seems to be in charge of the family and how often is he or she around?
5. Has the subject engaged in violence or threats of violence towards his or her siblings or parent(s)?
If so, what form of violence and to whom including frequency, intensity and recency?
6. What is the historical baseline at home?
What is the current baseline at home? Is there evidence of evolution at home?
7. Are the parents concerned for their own safety or the safety of their children or others?
8. Does the student's level of risk (at home, school or in the community) cycle according to who is in the home?
For example, the student is low risk for violence when the father is home but high risk when the father is away for work?
9. Does the student have a history of trauma including car accidents, falls, exposure to violence and abuse?
10. Has the student been diagnosed with a DSM diagnosis?
11. Is there a history of mental health issues or drug and alcohol abuse in the family?

SERIES EIGHT QUESTIONS: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

1. Has the threat maker experienced a recent loss, such as a death of a family member, recent breakup, rejection by a peer or peer group been cut from a sports team received notice from a college, university or the military?
2. Has his or her parents divorced or separated?
3. Is he or she the victim of child abuse and has the abuse been dormant but resurfaced at this time?
4. Is he or she being initiated into a gang? If so, is it voluntary or forced recruitment?
5. Has he or she recently had an argument with a parent, caregiver or someone close to him or her?
6. Has he or she recently been charged with an offence, or suspended or expelled from school?
7. Is the place where he or she has been suspended likely to increase or decrease the level of risk?

Determination of Risk

Step 8 in the School Administrator's Guide and the Community Response Guide

After data gathering is complete, the VTRA team should come back together to review and consolidate the data and discuss all relevant information regarding the student. As a team, ask the following questions: "To what extent does the student pose a threat to school or student safety?" "Does the student pose a threat to himself or herself or someone outside the school such as a family member?"

Low level of concern: Risk to safety is minimal

- Available information suggests the person is unlikely to carry out the threat or become violent. *NOTE:* Categorization of low risk doesn't imply no risk. Rather, it indicates the individual is at little risk for violence and monitoring the concern is appropriate.
- The threat is vague and indirect.
- Information contained within the threat is inconsistent, implausible, lacks detail or lacks realism.
- The threat is within the general range for typical baseline behaviour for the threat maker.

Medium level of concern: The threat could be carried out, although it may not appear entirely realistic. Violent action is possible

- Threat is more plausible and concrete than a low-level threat. The threat maker is deemed to be at an elevated risk for violence.

- Wording in the threat and information gathered suggests some thought has been given to how the threat will be carried out for example, a possible place and time.
- There is no clear evidence of planning such as weapon seeking. However, there are reasons to believe the threat is not empty because of verbal remarks or reported history.
- There are moderate or lingering concerns about the student’s potential to act violently.
- There is an increase in baseline behaviour.

High level of concern: There appears to be imminent and serious danger to the safety of others.

- The threat is specific and plausible, there is an identified target, and the student has the capacity to act out the threat.
- Information suggests concrete steps were taken towards acting out the threat for example, the student has acquired a weapon, practiced on a weapon or has had the victim under surveillance.
- Information suggests strong concern about the student’s potential to act violently.
- There is a significant increase in baseline behaviour.

With the input of *all* VTRA team members, decide on a course of action. If there is a low to medium level of

concern, the student can likely be managed at school with appropriate (increased) supervision. If threat is assessed to be moderate to high level of concern, advise agency and/or school division VTRA Lead that Stage 2 is required

Intervention Planning and Communication

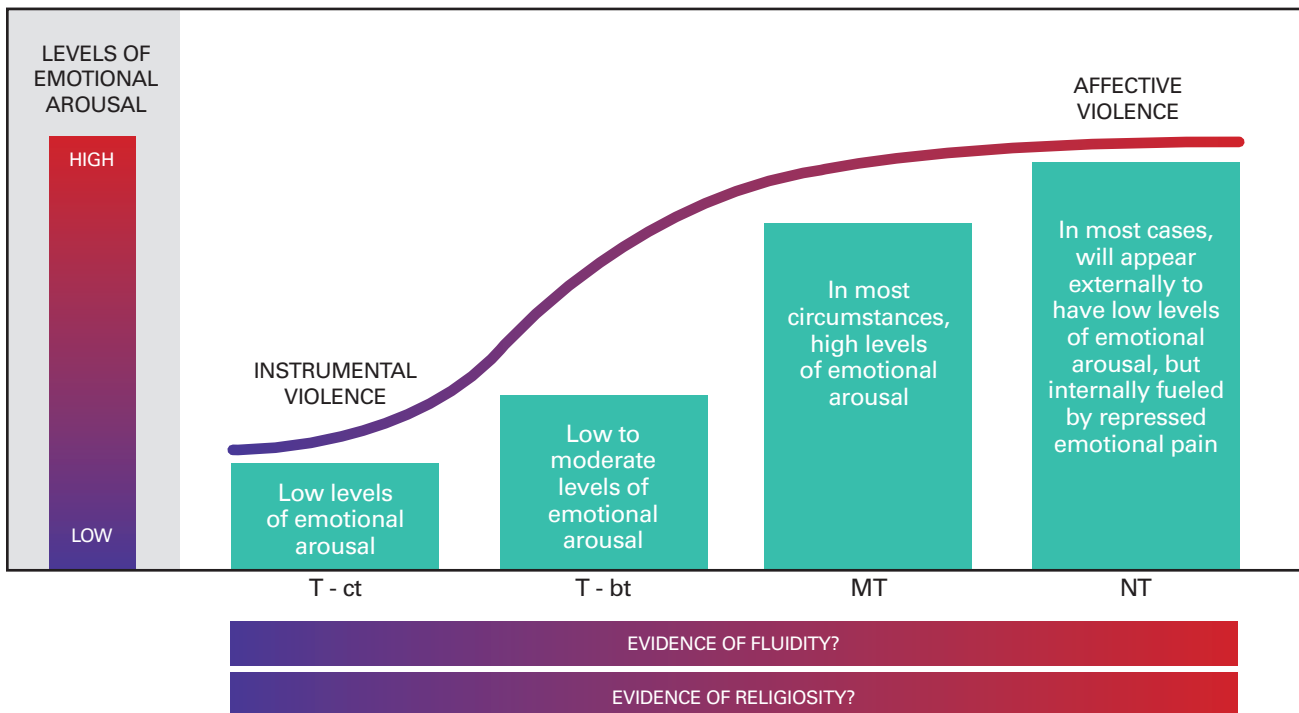
Steps 9-10 in the School Administrator’s Guide and the Community Response Guide

Develop a plan for intervention, with strategies to address all identified risk factors. Record the plan in the final section of this form (“Stage 1 Intervention Plan”).

Have a meeting with the threat maker and the guardians to discuss the intervention plan. If moving to Stage 2, this will be a larger meeting with more community partners present (see pg. 12, “Stage 2”).

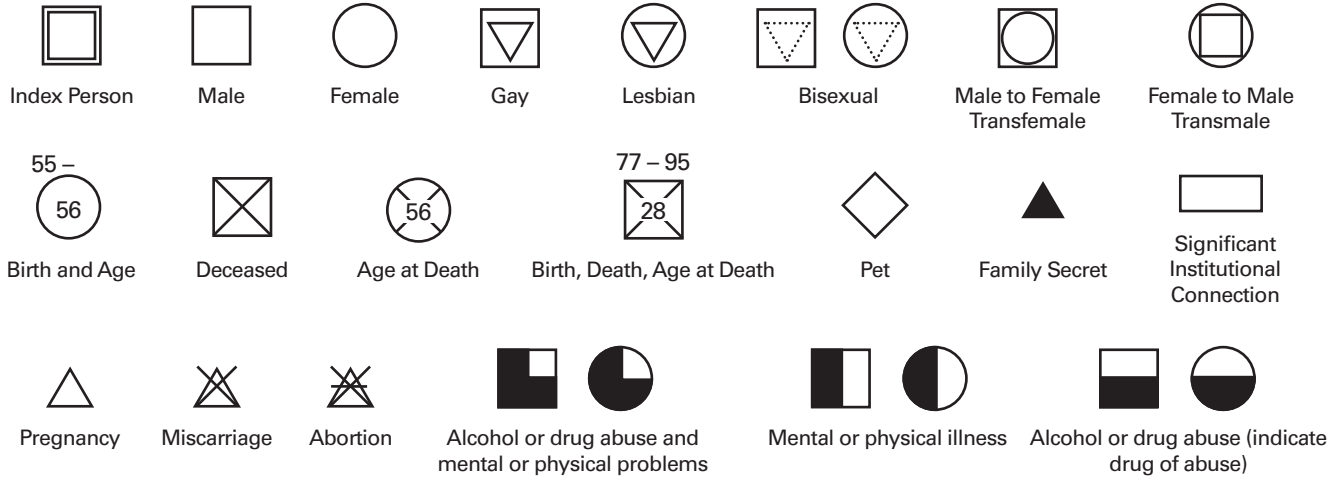
Send the completed Stage 1 VTRA Data, Stage 1 Intervention Plan and any supporting documentation such as notes and pictures to the school division VTRA lead for safe storage. If the threat maker is not school aged, the team should together determine what protocol partner will store the VTRA documentation.

THREAT MAKER TYPOLOGY

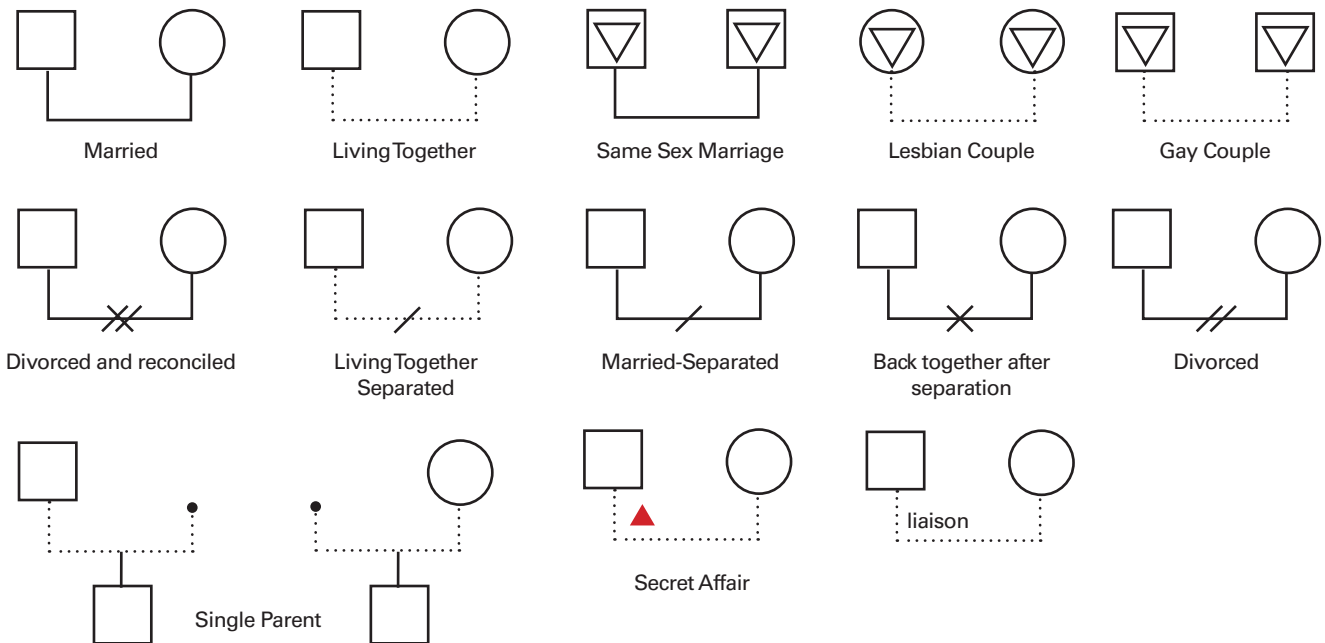


GENOGRAM SYMBOLS

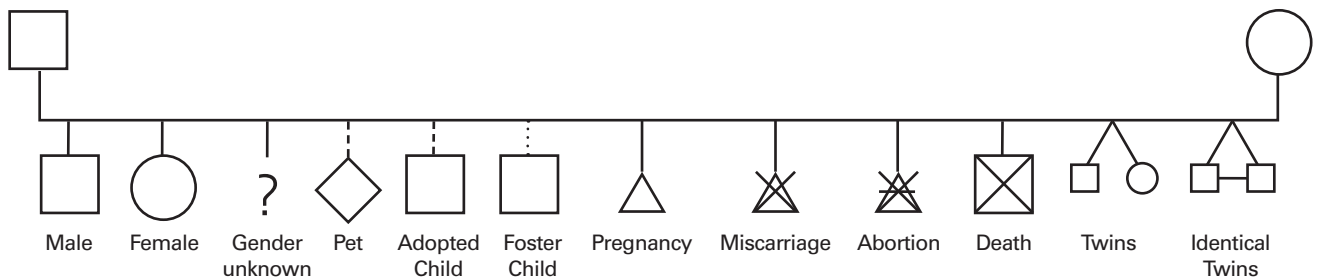
Basic Symbols



Basic Couple Relationships



Basic Child Relationships



VTRA Stage 1 Report Form

Student:		School:	
DOB:	ASN:	Grade:	Age:
Parents/guardians names and phone numbers:			
Date of incident:		Previous VTRAs?	
VTRA team members names and roles:			

Series One: Details of the incident

Series Two: Attack-related behaviours



Series Three: Empty vessel



Series Four: Threat-maker typology

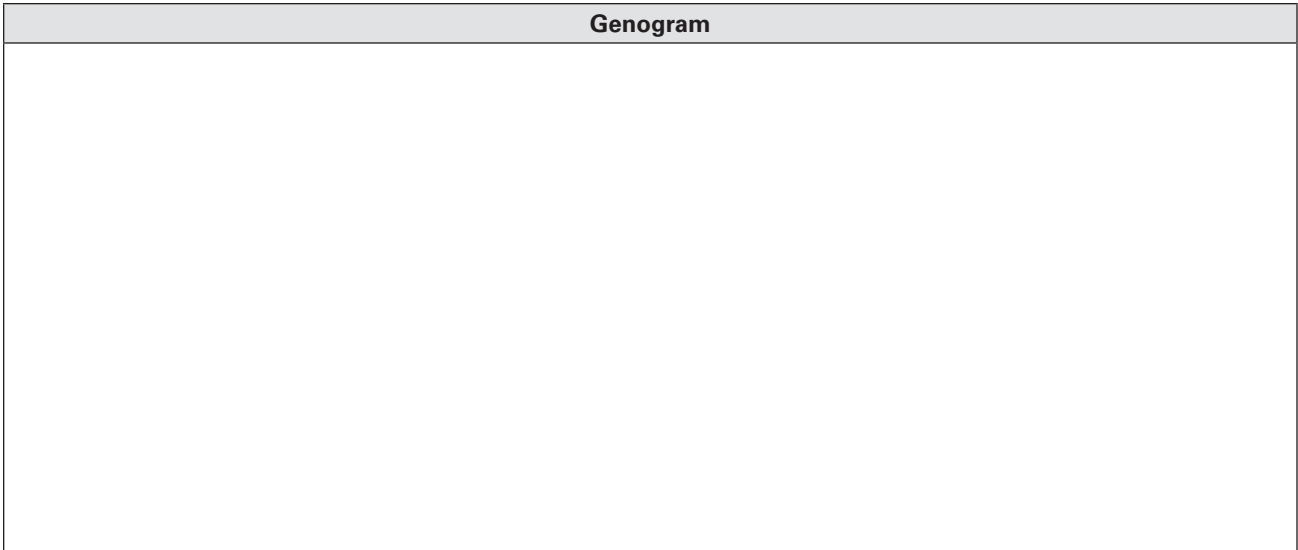


Series Five: Target typology

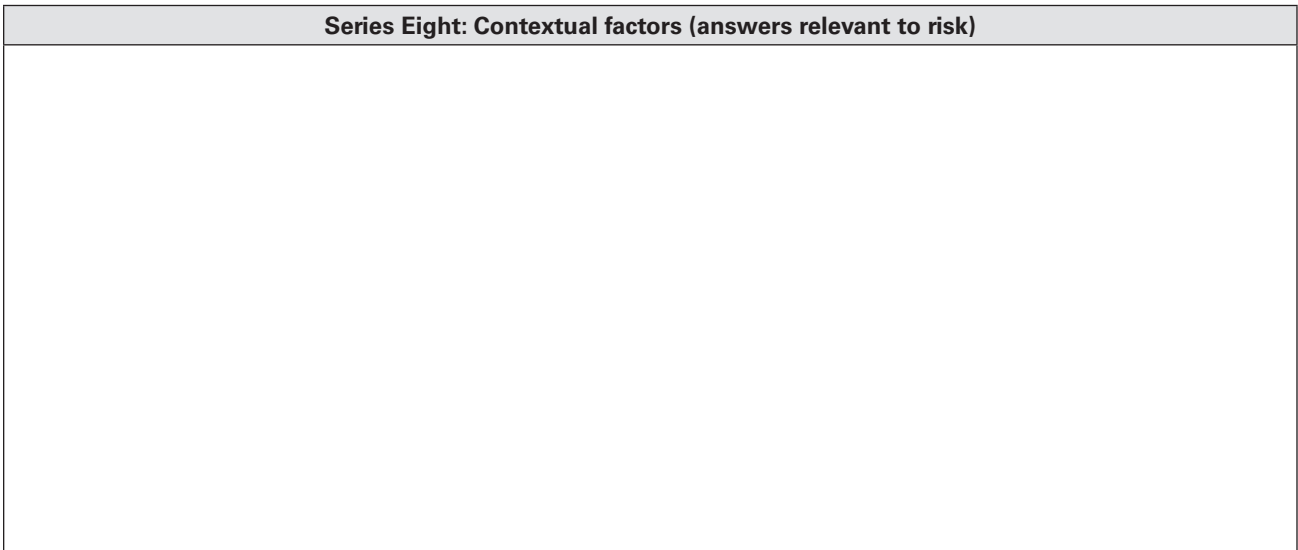
Series Six: Peer dynamics (answers relevant to risk)

Series Seven: Family dynamics (answers relevant to risk)

Genogram



Series Eight: Contextual factors (answers relevant to risk)



Stage 1 Intervention Plan

School Response - Risk reducing interventions at school	
Disciplinary action taken?	
Intended target warned and parents/guardians notified?	
Suicide risk assessment? Date completed:	Completed by:
Alert teachers and other staff on a need-to-know basis. Details of notification:	
<p>Increase monitoring for an identified period of time following the incident. Which of the following will be put in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily or weekly check-in with (Title/Name) • Daily bag/belongings check by (Title/Name) • Increased supervision in these settings: • Modified daily schedule (e.g. late arrival and/or early dismissal): 	
<p>Behaviour Support Plan for school required? If so, create one and attach a copy to this form. (If an Instructional Support Plan (ISP) or Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) is in place, review the goals/strategies and make any required changes)</p>	
Identify precipitating/aggravating circumstances and determine what intervention(s) will be put in place to alleviate tension for example, class schedule changes and medication issues:	
<p>Community-based services required? Identify any referrals that will be made for example, drug and alcohol intervention, mental health services, family-school liaison worker:</p>	

Parent/guardian(s) Response: Risk reducing factors at home and community
Parents will provide the following supervision and support:
Any referrals to outside service parents will followup on?

Plan for Followup
VTRA team including parents/guardians will monitor the intervention plan regularly and modify as appropriate. The team including parents/guardians will come back together to review plan and determine if interventions have successfully reduced the risk. Followup meeting(s) planned for:

VTRA Stage 2 Report Form

The focus for Stage 2 VTRA is a comprehensive risk evaluation and intervention planning by a multidisciplinary team. Members of various partner agencies collaborate with the school team and parents to gain a deeper understanding of the child. The goal is to create a comprehensive intervention plan.

Student:		School:	
DOB:	ASN:	Grade:	Age:
Parents/guardians names and phone numbers:			
Date of Stage 1 VTRA:		Level of Risk determined at Stage 1:	
Key data from Stage 1 VTRA:			
Key interventions identified in Stage 1 VTRA:			

Name	Agency and role	Relationship with student/client

Stage 2 Data Gathered

Summary of assessments or agency interventions that resulted from Stage 1 VTRA (outcomes, diagnosis, recommendations and progress toward goals):

Current Risk Enhancers, supports still required (use the VTRA Intervention Planning Worksheet as a guide):

Stage 2 Intervention Plan (Action Items)

Partner Agency: _____ will follow through on the following

Partner Agency: _____ will follow through on the following

Partner Agency: _____ will follow through on the following

Partner Agency: _____ will follow through on the following

Plan for Followup

VTRA team (including parents/guardians) will monitor the intervention plan regularly and modify as appropriate. The team (including parents/guardians) will come back together to review plan and determine if interventions have successfully reduced the risk. Followup meeting(s) planned for:

VTRA Intervention Planning Worksheet

Case Specific Data (CSD)

Notwithstanding traditional risk enhancers based on statistically derived variables, are there factors unique to the current case that may be contributing to level of risk?

Risk Enhancer	Intervention	Lead Professional (Agency)
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

Sample Fair Notice Letter

Dear parents/guardians,

<INSERT SCHOOL DIVISION / AGENCY NAME> is committed to providing a safe and caring environment for all students, clients, staff and community members. As such, we have worked together with police and community partners to adopt a Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) Protocol for the Elk Island region. This is a systematic and collaborative approach to threat assessment, whereby community partners work together to investigate potential threats and put supportive interventions in place. VTRA promotes a common language and understanding of threat assessment, makes use of the expertise of various community partners, and encourages a multidisciplinary approach to violence prevention.

All VTRA partners are committed to intervening when behaviour indicates an individual is moving along a pathway toward serious violence. Please be advised all threats of violence will be taken seriously and investigated according to the VTRA protocol. Examples include, but are not limited to the following:

- violent behaviour with the intent to harm or kill another person;
- verbal or written threats to seriously harm others or cause significant property damage;
- internet, text or social media threats to seriously harm others;
- possession of weapons including replicas;
- bomb threats or making or detonating explosive devices;
- fire setting; and
- sexual intimidation or assault.

The Elk Island VTRA Protocol outlines how schools and agencies will respond immediately to threatening behaviour. The RCMP and school administration is always involved as a partner early in the process, with additional school division and community supports being brought in as needed. This may include psychologists, social workers, family-school liaison workers, mental health clinicians and other professionals as relevant to the situation. Parents and guardians will be notified as early as possible in the process. Personal information shared throughout the VTRA process will respect and balance each individual's right to privacy with the need to ensure the safety of all.

The Elk Island Violence Threat Risk Assessment Protocol is available on our website at <INSERT URL>. For more information, contact <INSERT SCHOOL DIVISION/AGENCY CONTACT NAME AND NUMBER>.

VTRA Incident Record

<INSERT SCHOOL DIVISION LOGO>

Notice of VTRA Incident Record

Please be advised:

A Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) was done on <INSERT STUDENT'S NAME> at <INSERT SCHOOL NAME> during the <INSERT YEAR> school year

Information related to the Violence Threat Risk Assessment is stored at the division's central office in a confidential critical-incident file, which is separate from the student record. The critical incident file is retained for 10 years past graduation, as per the *Alberta Limitations Act* (2011). Should the student continue on to another school division, prior to graduation, relevant information may be shared with the incoming school to ensure best practice for safety.

For further information on this Violence Threat Risk Assessment, contact the VTRA lead at the school division office. <INSERT CONTACT INFORMATION>

Signatories to the Protocol

Alberta Health Services
Children, Youth, and Families
Addiction and Mental Health
Edmonton Zone



Alberta Health Services
Community Addiction and Mental Health
Central Zone -East



Ministry of Children Services
Edmonton and Area



Alberta

Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response
(CCTATR)



Signatories to the Protocol



Eastern Edge Regional Collaborative Service Delivery



Elk Island Catholic Schools



Elk Island Public Schools



City of Fort Saskatchewan
Family and Community Support Services



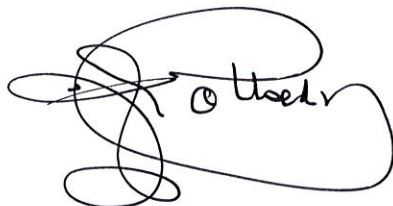
Signatories to the Protocol



Sherwood Park Strathcona County
Primary Care Network



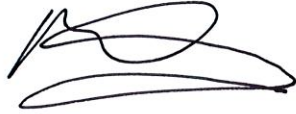
Strathcona County



Vegreville Family and
Community Support Services



Signatories to the Protocol



Fort Saskatchewan RCMP



Strathcona County RCMP



Vegreville RCMP



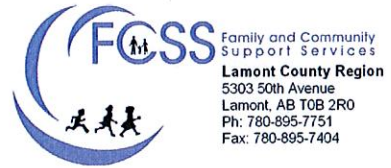
Signatories to the Protocol



A Safe Place
A Shelter for Abused Women and Their Children



**Lamont County Family and Community
Support Services**



New Horizons School



Special Thanks

The Elk Island Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) Protocol is based on the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response model of VTRA and the work of J. Kevin Cameron, the executive director of CCTATR.

We also wish to acknowledge the work of the many school boards and community organizations that have developed regional protocols in working to support the safety of children, youth and families. And, a special thanks to the VTRA Protocol Committees for Leduc and area, Pembina River and area, and Saskatoon and area. The willingness to share experiences and resources has strengthened the Elk Island VTRA Protocol and its process.