



BEST PRACTICES IN SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT: TRAINING, CONSULTATION, AND SUPPORT

No matter where it occurs, a school shooting can have a tremendous impact across the globe, prompting questions about what schools are doing to keep their students, faculty, and staff safe. Planned school attacks have been prevented when schools have learned of threats and moved quickly to gather information, assess the situation, and intervene where necessary. We train schools how to identify, investigate, assess, and intervene in cases of threats and other concerning behavior. We help schools take a more proactive and preventive stance to protect their students, faculty, staff, and visitors from harm. Through training, consultation, and support services, we guide schools in their efforts to respond to, investigate, and manage threatening situations so they can prevent harm before it can occur.

Our approach to training and consultation is based on an integration of research and practice that is unmatched in the field. Our threat assessment experts have over 30 years of combined experience investigating individual threat cases and conducting original research on targeted violence and threat assessment in educational institutions. Our training and consulting services represent the best practices available. Our approach has been cited as a model program for threat assessment and management services. Most importantly, our approach is easy to understand and implement, and is designed to maximize a school or district's existing capabilities. The goal of each training session is to provide participants with the information, guidance and materials they need to evaluate, de-escalate, and manage a broad range of threatening or troubling behaviors and concerning situations. Participants leave our training sessions with information they can use right away.

We are dedicated to preventing violence and to empowering our clients to do the same. From our empirical research, we know that the majority of violent situations in school can be prevented, de-escalated and managed. From our practical experience investigating, evaluating, and intervening in hundreds of individual threat cases, we know that threat assessment is complex, but not complicated. There is no need for cumbersome procedures and protocols. But threat assessment does take the right training, identifying the right people to be involved in the process, and having experienced professionals that you can depend upon for advice when needed. We believe that most schools and districts have many of the critical elements already in place, but can benefit from expert consultation in maximizing their threat assessment capabilities and improving collaboration and coordination of case management services.

TRAINING

We provide training for school, law enforcement, and mental health personnel on how to identify, investigate, assess, and manage students (as well as faculty, staff, or others) who make threats or

engage in other concerning behavior. Our threat assessment training is based on research and best practices in the area of school threat assessment, including the model for school threat assessment developed from the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education's landmark study of school shootings (which SIGMA Managing Partner Dr. Marisa Randazzo co-authored). This model has been used as a foundation for successful threat assessment programs in many schools, colleges, and corporations across the country.

BASIC THREAT ASSESSMENT TRAINING

Basic threat assessment training is available in half-day and full-day sessions. Both formats include an overview on the prevalence of different types of school crime and school shootings; case studies of school shootings; major facts about school shootings; implications for school safety and violence prevention; basic principles of school threat assessment; and, strategies for enhancing the school climate. In addition to these modules, full-day sessions also include key components of effective school threat assessment; recommended team composition, policies and procedures; steps for investigating and evaluating threats and other concerning behavior; resources and strategies for managing individuals that may pose a threat of harm; establishing key community relationships; sharing information amid FERPA and HIPAA concerns; considerations for public information officers; and case studies of prevented attacks. Basic threat assessment training is appropriate for administrators, faculty, counselors, school resources officers, local law enforcement, support staff, district staff, and other personnel who are committed to school safety. Community organizations with student contact, such as local sports teams or Boys and Girls Clubs, can also be included. For newly-formed threat assessment teams or existing committees that are adding a threat assessment capacity, we recommend at least a full day of basic training because of the breadth and depth of information covered.

ADVANCED THREAT ASSESSMENT TRAINING

Advanced training is offered for established school threat assessment teams. The training leads the team through one (half-day) or multiple (full-day) table-top exercises on fictitious threats, allowing the teams the opportunity to handle a specific threat case from start to finish, iron out their roles and responsibilities, and hone their procedures and decision-making, all with continuous trainer feedback. In addition to multiple table-top exercises, full day advanced training also includes discussion of advanced strategies for effective interviewing, red flags for deception in interviewing, and common problems and solutions in implementing school threat assessment programs.

GENERAL AWARENESS TRAINING

General awareness training sessions are offered to help threat assessment teams alert students, faculty, and staff to the array of resources (e.g., the threat assessment team, anonymous reporting mechanisms, counseling services, etc.) that are available to enhance school safety and to support students and staff that may be in need of some assistance. The training, crafted in consultation with the threat assessment team, can be used to inform school personnel and students that violent incidents can be prevented,

reinforce the message that threat assessment is about prevention and support; and tell them how and where to relay reports of threat or other concerns they may have.

CASE CONSULTATION SERVICES

INDIVIDUAL CASE CONSULTATION

We help threat assessment teams and other professionals to investigate, evaluate, and manage individual threat cases. Our case consultation services are tailored to the client's particular needs and can include identifying sources of information, interviewing persons of concern and others, evaluating information gathered, developing and implementing case management plans, addressing systemic problems, and identifying key resources necessary for case management or intervention.

CASE OUTSOURCING

We provide schools with outsourcing options for some or all of their threat assessment case activities, including case investigation, evaluation, management, and documentation. Case outsourcing can be used for all or a portion of a school's or school district's caseload.

CASE INVESTIGATION REVIEW

We review investigations already conducted by threat assessment teams or threat managers to identify additional areas of investigation and/or suggest options for case management and intervention strategies.

TEAM COACHING / SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE

We help some schools and school districts by participating in certain team meetings as a subject matter expert or resource. Institutions have used this option to help existing teams with complex cases and help new teams increase confidence in their procedures and decision making.

TEAM AUDIT & SUPPORT SERVICES

EXISTING TEAM AUDIT & EVALUATION

We evaluate the current functioning and case work of an existing threat assessment team. In conducting the audit we interview threat assessment team members and key stakeholders, observe team meetings, review cases assessed and managed, and collect other relevant information. Our analysis includes an overview of current team functioning, comparisons with current best practices, and recommendations for enhancing the school's and team's overall threat assessment and management capacity and process.

NEW TEAM DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT

We help schools and school districts to create threat assessment teams, establish the authority and capacity to conduct threat assessment investigations, and develop key case management resources. Team development services include a needs assessment of a school's existing assets and resources and recommendations on team membership, organizational placement, case documentation options, information-sharing strategies, sample case procedures and protocols, and any necessary policy enhancements.

POLICY REVIEW

We help schools to enhance their ability to gather and share information about a person who has raised some concern, through reviews of existing policies and procedures that govern the school's or district's ability to investigate threats and intervene to reduce risk.

CLIMATE SURVEYS

Studies have shown the importance of perceived safety in reducing violence in schools. In consultation with the client, we construct and implement anonymous surveys of to identify areas or situations that feel less safe to employees, students, and others (such as in certain areas or at certain times of day). Services include helping the client to develop and implement plans to enhance perceived safety.

ABOUT SIGMA

SIGMA Threat Management Associates, P.A. is a consortium of leading behavioral, legal, and law enforcement experts who help clients evaluate threats, manage problem behaviors, and prevent violence. A woman-owned small business, SIGMA provides threat assessment training and consulting services to clients worldwide.

Our name - "Sigma" - refers to the Greek term for "sum" or "total." We chose this name because it represents our approach to handling troubling and potentially dangerous behavior. In investigating and evaluating threats and other concerning behavior, we believe that it is important to look at the entirety of the situation -- or the "sum" of all available information. Moreover, in effectively managing situations of concern, we have found it critical to be able to implement a combination of available resources - rather than just one. Finally, in handling threats and disturbing situations, we recommend consulting with colleagues, to capitalize on the sum of all available expertise and promote overall safety.

MANAGING PARTNERS

MARISA (REDDY) RANDAZZO, PH.D.

Dr. Marisa Randazzo is a Managing Partner of SIGMA Threat Management Associates and an international expert on threat assessment, targeted violence, and violence prevention. Before joining the private sector, Dr. Randazzo served for ten years with the U.S. Secret Service, most recently as the agency's Chief Research Psychologist. Among her various responsibilities, she co-directed the *Safe School Initiative*, the landmark federal study of school shootings that was conducted jointly by the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Randazzo is an accomplished presenter and instructor on threat assessment investigations, having trained over 10,000 professionals in law enforcement, management, administration, mental health, and the intelligence community throughout the United States, Canada, and the European Union. Her research is used in the federal, state, and local law enforcement communities and has been credited in the media with preventing planned attacks. She is co-author of *The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment and Management Teams* (2008) and lead author of *Implementing Behavioral Threat Assessment on Campus: A Virginia Tech Demonstration Project* (2009). Dr. Randazzo has testified before Congress and has been interviewed by major television, radio, and print news outlets, including *60 Minutes*, the *Today Show*, the *Early Show*, *48 Hours*, *Dateline NBC*, *MSNBC*, the *New York Times*, and *National Public Radio*. She has published numerous articles on threat assessment and violence prevention and has served on the editorial board of the *Journal of Threat Assessment*. She has also published under her maiden name, Marisa Reddy. Dr. Randazzo received her Ph.D. and Master's degree from Princeton University in Social Psychology, and a B.A. in Psychology and Religion from Williams College. In 2005, Dr. Randazzo was awarded the Williams College Bicentennial Medal for her work in preventing violence. She is listed in several *Who's Who* publications for her threat assessment research and training contributions.

GENE DEISINGER, PH.D.

Gene Deisinger, Ph.D. is a Managing Partner of SIGMA Threat Management Associates. He also serves as Deputy Chief of Police and Director of Threat Management Services for Virginia Tech. Dr. Deisinger earned his doctorate in counseling psychology from Iowa State University. He brings a unique perspective as a licensed psychologist, a certified health service provider in psychology, and a certified law enforcement officer.

Dr. Deisinger was a founding member of the Iowa State University Critical Incident Response Team. This multi-disciplinary team served as a pro-active planning group and coordinated institutional responses during crisis situations, including situations involving threats of violence. Dr. Deisinger developed the threat management program and served as the primary threat manager for Iowa State University from the team's inception in 1994, until accepting his current position at Virginia Tech in August, 2009. He has personally managed and supervised threat cases and protective details for a broad range of governmental dignitaries, public figures, and members of the university community.

For over 16 years, Dr. Deisinger has provided consultation and training to schools, colleges and universities, governmental agencies, and corporations, assisting them in developing, implementing, and

refining their threat management services. He has provided consultation on a broad range of cases, helping organizations to implement integrated case management strategies. He has also been an invited presenter for numerous national and international professional organizations.

In 2008, Dr. Deisinger (along with principal co-author Dr. Marisa Randazzo) published *The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment & Management Teams*, a practical resource designed specifically for institutions of higher education. The *Handbook* has been recognized as exemplifying best practices for implementing and operating campus threat assessment and management teams.

Dr. Deisinger currently serves as a subject matter expert and trainer for the Campus Threat Assessment Training initiative for institutions of higher education, a program offered through the US Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. In 2009, Dr. Deisinger was appointed as a Fellow of the US Department of Education's Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention. In 2008, Dr. Deisinger was appointed as a subject matter expert for a joint project by the US Department of Education, US Secret Service and Federal Bureau of Investigation. That project resulted in a monograph (published in April, 2010) entitled *Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education*.

Dr. Deisinger has provided operational support and training for several local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. From 2002-2009, he served as a Special Deputy United States Marshal with the Joint Terrorism Task Force of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation. In 2009, in response to the tragedy at Fort Hood, Dr. Deisinger was requested to assist the Department of the Army in enhancing force protection and threat management capabilities.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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