



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

In the wake of targeted attacks like the assassination attempt on Representative Gabrielle Giffords in Tucson, the campus shooting at Virginia Tech, and the school shooting at Columbine High School, people often ask what can be done to prevent such attacks. In fact, research has shown that many of these attacks are preventable. Prior to these attacks, different people surrounding the attacker often have significant concerns about the attacker's behavior or have learned about the attacker's violent plans. Yet they often do not know where to report such concerns. Having a threat assessment team – or a threat assessment process – whether at a college, or in the workplace, or in the community – gives people a place to report these concerns. A threat assessment process can also quickly sort out the misunderstandings from the true concerns. Most importantly, a threat assessment process makes it possible to intervene with the person that has raised concerns, to prevent harm from occurring and get them to the help they may need. Threat assessment has been used for decades to prevent targeted attacks.

Threat assessment – also known as behavioral threat assessment or threat management – is a process designed to identify, investigate, evaluate, and manage threats, stalking, harassment, and other troubling behavior. The goal of threat assessment is to prevent harm and enhance overall safety. The threat assessment model was originally developed by the U.S. Secret Service to protect the U.S. President and the electoral process. Many corporations and government agencies have used threat assessment teams for several decades, since the process was adopted by the U.S. Postal Service. And since the campus shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University, threat assessment teams have been developed on many college and university campuses throughout the United States – after numerous prominent organizations and task forces all recommended that campuses create threat assessment teams as a key measure to prevent violence. The commonwealth of Virginia and the state of Illinois now have laws that require their colleges and universities to establish threat assessment teams. Most recently, in 2010, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) approved a new risk analysis standard for colleges and universities that says all colleges and universities should have such teams. Threat assessment is now used broadly to prevent violence and sabotage in the workplace, on campus, in school, and against public officials, public figures, and their families.

In our work, we help businesses, educational institutions, local and state government agencies, and executive protection professionals to develop and implement their own threat assessment programs so that they can identify, investigate, evaluate, and intervene with persons and situations that raise concern or that jeopardize safety. We also help organizations and security professionals to handle individual threat and stalking cases, consulting on a portion of the investigation or handling the case in its entirety. Our approach to training and consultation is based on an integration of research and

practice that is unmatched in the field. Our managing partners personally 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, and recommended as a critical resource in the new ANSI-approved risk analysis standard. Most importantly, our approach is easy to understand and implement, and is designed to maximize existing capabilities. The goal of our training is to provide participants with 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. Our costs also include reference materials and sample policies.

We are dedicated to preventing violence and to empowering our clients to do the same. From our empirical research, we know that majority of targeted violence situations and rampage attacks 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 workplaces, educational institutions, and communities have many of the critical elements already in place, but can benefit from expert consultation to maximize their threat assessment capabilities and improve collaboration and coordination of case management resources.

TRAINING

Our threat assessment training is based on research and best practices in the area of threat assessment and threat management, including the U.S. Secret Service model of threat assessment, [The Handbook for Campus Threat Assessment & Management Teams](#) (co-authored by SIGMA managing partners Dr. Randazzo and Dr. Deisinger), and [Implementing Behavioral Threat Assessment on Campus: A Virginia Tech Demonstration Project](#) (co-authored by Dr. Randazzo), which are now included in the ANSI-approved national standard for risk analysis for higher education institutions as resources for developing and implementing threat assessment and management programs.

BASIC THREAT ASSESSMENT TRAINING

Basic threat assessment training is available in half-day and full-day sessions. Both formats include basic statistics on the prevalence of different types of violent crime, including school shootings, workplace shootings, and/or public figure attacks (depending on the client's focus of interest); case studies of rampage shootings, major facts about targeted attacks and rampage shootings, implications for violence prevention and safety, basic principles of threat assessment and threat management, and strategies for

enhancing information-sharing and reporting. In addition, full-day sessions include recommended team composition, decision-making, and activities; supporting 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; identifying and developing key community resources; legal considerations for case documentation and accessing confidential/privileged information; and case studies of prevented attacks. Basic threat assessment training is appropriate for administrators or supervisors, mental health professionals, law enforcement or security professionals, human resources, administrative staff, and any others who are interested in responsible for violence prevention or safety.

ADVANCED THREAT ASSESSMENT TRAINING

Advanced training is offered for established threat assessment teams. The training leads the team through one (half-day) or multiple (full-day) table-top exercises on an array of simulated threats, allowing the team the opportunity to handle a threat case(s) from start to finish, hone their roles and responsibilities, and evaluate their procedures and decision-making, all with trainer feedback. In addition to more 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 campus threat assessment programs.

GENERAL AWARENESS TRAINING

General awareness sessions are offered to help threat assessment teams alert those in their workplace, educational institution, or community about the existence of the team and the array of resources that can be accessed to prevent violence, enhance safety, and get help for persons that may be troubled or in need of some assistance. The training, crafted in consultation with the threat assessment team, can be used to inform personnel and community members 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 any 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 businesses, educational institutions, and executive protection details 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 an organization'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 institutions 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 organization's and team's overall threat assessment and management capacity and process.

NEW TEAM DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT

We help businesses, educational institutions, government agencies, and private security 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 an institution'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 businesses and educational institutions 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 organization or institution's ability to investigate threats and intervene to reduce risk.

CLIMATE SURVEYS

Studies have shown the importance of perceived safety in reducing violence and sabotage in schools, colleges, and workplace settings. 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.

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