WEBINAR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Presenters:
Larry Borland, Chief of Security (Retired), Academy School District 20, Colorado Springs, CO
Gene Deisinger, Deputy Chief of Police, Virginia Tech University, Blacksburg, VA

Law Enforcement’s Role in Threat Assessment

1. Are there any police departments with threat assessment policies?
   Deisinger: Yes. Law enforcement agencies are increasingly involved in threat assessment practices, and many have developed policies and/or procedures to guide those efforts. One of the longest standing programs of this sort is the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Threat Management Unit (TMU), as well as the threat management unit of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS). Detective Jeff Dunn has a great chapter in the International Handbook of Threat Assessment (2014, ed. J. Reid Meloy and Jens Hoffman) regarding the LAPD TMU, and (now retired) Special Agent Dorian Van Horn, has a great chapter about the NCIS program in the same book. These would be great places to start.

2. Does a threat assessment team include teachers, school administrators, and local law enforcement? What about school board members?
   Deisinger: An effective threat management process incorporates a multi-disciplinary approach, involving roles (and individuals) that are well placed to learn about developing threats and concerns, and who bring skills and resources from their professional background and role to help mitigate identified concerns. Typically, teams will incorporate administrators/executives, security/law enforcement personnel, mental health experts, and legal advisors as a core group, with additional members based on the needs of the organization and its resources.

Reporting and Investigation of Threats

1. Do schools currently have a confidential tip line and or reward program in place for students to report threats? How do you fund these?
   Borland: Yes, some do. In the state of Colorado, the Safe2Tell line is funded by the state. Schools can create their own anonymous tip system and seek private or public funding, but they may lack the legal protections offered by a statutory tip line.

2. How does confidentiality fit into the reporting process? How do you make sure it is safe for the students to report?
Borland: The student may not be able to remain anonymous if there is a criminal investigation, unless there is enabling legislation for anonymous reporting, such as Crime Stoppers or Safe2Tell. That said, schools may certainly keep the identity of the reporter confidential.

3. **How do you investigate anonymous threats (e.g., a threatening message scrawled on a restroom wall)?**
   
   Borland: While these threats can be frustrating, they still need to be investigated to the extent possible. Photographs of writing on walls or stalls should be taken before the threat is removed. These messages should not be allowed to stay on walls, etc., but should be removed as soon as possible. Schools should not investigate such threats on their own, but call in law enforcement.

4. **What are the differences in assessing the threat when the target is a public figure versus a private figure?**
   
   Deisinger: There has been a growing body of research regarding similarities and differences between attacks on public figures (e.g., president of a campus) and private figures (e.g., roommate or significant other). The level of prior intimacy/relationship can influence how threats are communicated and interpreted. There are many nuances here, and are beyond the scope of a quick response like this. I suggest reviewing the *International Handbook of Threat Assessment*, edited by Dr. Reid Meloy and Dr. Jens Hoffman. That Handbook has several excellent chapters that speak to this issue.

5. **How can we use social media when assessing the potential for violence?**
   
   Deisinger: Social media are helpful and important tools, and can be used like any other source of information about developing or identifying concerns. Note that it is not just “kids” that use social media, but faculty, staff and other adults as well. Social media can be used to broadcast intentions and communicate threats or harassment, but can also be used to build a culture of care and concern within a community. They are tools, not inherently good or bad – so use them to their best potential. Note that there are complex legal and ethical issues about monitoring social media of a community (especially by law enforcement) and this should be carefully considered before implementation.

6. **There was a teen actually killed in my local high school before classes. How can such incidents be prevented during such unstructured and less supervised school hours?**
   
   Borland: Without more information, I would be reluctant to address a specific case. However, the degree to which there is good supervision before school as well as active and aware adults present in the lives of students can improve the safety of the educational environment.

**Legal Issues in Threat Assessment**

1. **Do you have any idea how many states have legislation that specifically addresses student threats and assessment?**
   
   Deisinger: I don’t know how many states have legislation but I do know that Virginia requires the public institutions of higher education and public school divisions to have threat assessment teams. Illinois requires all institutions of higher education to have threat assessment teams. Connecticut requires threat assessment teams at state colleges. Some states, such as Iowa, may not have state laws requiring threat assessment processes, but have implemented Governing Board Policies with similar requirements.
2. What should happen if the expulsion board/team sends the violator back to the school with the victim?
   Borland: There should be a safety plan developed to govern the behavior of the student who made the threat. Some states have laws that prohibit victims and suspects from going to school together, depending upon the type of offense. Check your state law.

3. Should you tape record all interviews?
   Deisinger: There are a number of considerations about recording interviews. Are we talking about witnesses, victims or potential perpetrators? Is it a criminal investigation or a general inquiry about an ambiguous concern? What are the laws in your state regarding recordings? How about laws regarding recording without knowledge/consent of the other party? Your question is a great one, but there are too many considerations to sort through here. Seek guidance from your legal counsel and others on your team who are experienced with such interviews.

Threat Assessments and Parents

1. Are parents given policies on threats?
   Borland: Yes. Typically, policies are posted online. In addition, they may posted in abbreviated form in student handbooks and/or class rules.

2. Must parents be present in order for police to question/investigate them?
   Borland: It depends on the circumstances, such as the nature and focus of the questioning or investigation. If the focus of suspicion is on the child, then generally, the child must be advised of his or her rights and parents must be present. However, a school resource officer may question students without parents present and without advisement of rights if the focus of the investigation/suspicion is not on the student. In some states, a student may not be compelled to write a statement that could result in his/her expulsion without parents present.

3. Do the parents of the threatened student have a right to know who is threatening him/her, if the threat was not made directly to him/her (for minors)?
   Borland: Yes. There is a duty to warn students and their parents if there is a threat against them. Most threats actually constitute a crime, so if police are involved, they can warn the students/parents if the school is reluctant to do so.

Mental Health/Behavioral Issues in Threat Assessment

1. What are some issues in sharing in mental health evaluation with school officials? What about Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) violations?
   Borland: As long as the parent signs a release of information authorization, there should be no problem. However, the release authorization may be withdrawn at any time by the parent. Please note that schools may share information with law enforcement if there is a safety or welfare concern under Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations.

2. Are students with mental issues exempt due to legalities?
   Borland: No. If a crime was committed, it is questionable that this would create a legal defense. If the student is disruptive to the educational process, consider a change in educational setting.
3. **When considering transient threats, do you consider patterns of behavior as well?**
   **Borland:** Yes. Patterns of behavior can point to other issues going on that need to be addressed.

4. **Is there any correlation between teachers or staff behavior and student violence?**
   **Borland:** No one can predict future behavior with any degree of accuracy. But staff who are welcoming, involved and interested can definitely influence behavior. It is important that staff take an active interest in all students, especially the difficult ones. Likewise, staff, like all adults, should model appropriate behavior.

5. **If a person of concern is unresponsive/unwilling to engage in the threat assessment process, how does the team remain involved with them?**
   **Borland:** Uncooperative students may still be governed by a safety plan or even removed from school under certain circumstances.

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**Threat Assessment Programs and Training**

1. **Are education and training different?**
   **Deisinger:** Yes. Education and awareness involve (at minimum) building knowledge. Training involves building and practicing skills. Both are important. You make an excellent point that many of us learn best by DOING and not just listening or watching. Giving community members an opportunity to build skills leads to enhanced competence, confidence, and engagement. Those are good for everyone!

2. **What training is available in the university setting to prepare students to respond to potential threats?**
   **Deisinger:** There are several training programs to help prepare students, faculty and staff to respond to potential threats, including, but not limited to “active shooter” situations. Many of these are variations of the A.L.I.C.E. (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) program. At the core of these programs is awareness about options and decision making during critical incidents. These should not be formulaic in nature, but emphasize situational awareness and responses that reduce risk of harm. Many programs also include elements instructing how to respond upon arrival of law enforcement personnel.

   These programs can be helpful to address questions and concerns about responding in times of safety crises; however, I recommend that the programs also include discussion about what the university does to help prevent violence and reduce risk – i.e., the threat assessment and management program.

3. **How do you get administration to support bystander training?**
   **Deisinger:** First, be sure administrators understand what you mean by “bystander training”. Often, those of us in the field use terms that our administrators aren’t familiar with, and it is hard to support what you don’t understand! For many doing threat assessment, it is part of the “other duties as assigned,” so administrators may be concerned about additional time taken away from primary duties. Help them understand that an active outreach program, including (but not limited to) bystander intervention training, is essential to the ongoing success of a violence prevention effort. Invite them along so they can see how community members seek to...
engage in these sessions, and then show a lot of appreciation for the opportunity to learn how to get involved.

4. **Is there ever any consideration for establishing an objective community-based threat assessment service that contracts with the school?**

   **Borland:** Yes. If the school lacks the resources to conduct threat assessments, then seeking outside assistance is fine. I would caution, however, that the school MUST be a part of the process and take an active role in the assessment process and threat management process, as ultimately it is the school system that is responsible and accountable for maintaining a safe learning environment.

5. **I would like to do a threat assessment at my college...where can I get the information?**

   **Deisinger:** Threat assessment and management is a process, not just an event. If you are looking for information about how to develop a threat management program, there were several resources cited in the webinar materials. There are great resources in the public domain so start there. Feel free to contact [Gene Deisinger](mailto:Gene.Deisinger@IACP.org) for more information.

   **IACP:** The IACP offers a range of professional services, including threat assessments. Contact Kim Kohlhepp at kohlheppk@theiacp.org or 1-800-THE-IACP-x237 for more information.

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