

# 11 KEY QUESTIONS

## 1. What are the student's motive(s) and goals?

- What motivated the student to make the statements or take the actions that caused him or her to come to attention?
- Does the situation or circumstance that led to these statements or actions still exist?
- Does the student have a major grievance or grudge? Against whom?
- What efforts have been made to resolve the problem and what has been the result? Does the potential attacker feel that any part of the problem is resolved or see any alternatives?

## 2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?

- What, if anything, has the student communicated to someone else (targets, friends, other students, teachers, family, others) or written in a diary, journal, or Web site concerning his or her ideas and/or intentions?
- Have friends been alerted or "warned away"?

## 3. Has the subject shown inappropriate interest in any of the following?

- a. school attacks or attackers;
- b. weapons (including recent acquisition of any relevant weapon);
- c. incidents of mass violence (terrorism, workplace violence, mass murderers).

## 4. Has the student engaged in attack-related behaviors? These behaviors might include:

- developing an attack idea or plan;
- making efforts to acquire or practice with weapons;
- casing, or checking out, possible sites and areas for attack;
- rehearsing attacks or ambushes.

**5. Does the student have the *capacity* to carry out an act of targeted violence?**

- How organized is the student's thinking and behavior?
- Does the student have the means, e.g., access to a weapon, to carry out an attack?

**6. Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation and/or despair?**

- Is there information to suggest that the student is experiencing desperation and/or despair?
- Has the student experienced a recent failure, loss and/or loss of status?
- Is the student known to be having difficulty coping with a stressful event?
- Is the student now, or has the student ever been, suicidal or "accident prone"? Has the student engaged in behavior that suggests that he or she has considered ending their life?

**7. Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?**

- Does the student have at least one relationship with an adult where the student feels that he or she can confide in the adult and believes that the adult will listen without judging or jumping to conclusions? (Students with trusting relationships with adults may be directed away from violence and despair and toward hope.)
- Is the student emotionally connected to—or disconnected from—other students?
- Has the student previously come to someone's attention or raised concern in a way that suggested he or she needs intervention or supportive services?

**8. Does the student see violence as an acceptable—or desirable—or the only—way to solve problems?**

- Does the setting around the student (friends, fellow students, parents, teachers, adults) explicitly or implicitly support or endorse violence as a way of resolving problems or disputes?
- Has the student been "dared" by others to engage in an act of violence?

**9. Is the student's conversation and "story" consistent with his or her actions?**

- Does information from collateral interviews and from the student's own behavior confirm or dispute what the student says is going on?

**10. Are other people concerned about the student's potential for violence?**

- Are those who know the student concerned that he or she might take action based on violent ideas or plans?
- Are those who know the student concerned about a specific target?
- Have those who know the student witnessed recent changes or escalations in mood and behavior?

**11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of an attack?**

- What factors in the student's life and/or environment might increase or decrease the likelihood that the student will attempt to mount an attack at school?
- What is the response of other persons who know about the student's ideas or plan to mount an attack? (Do those who know about the student's ideas actively discourage the student from acting violently, encourage the student to attack, deny the possibility of violence, passively collude with an attack, etc.?)

Thoughtful consideration of the answers to the above 11 questions will produce a sound foundation for the threat assessment team's response to the overarching question in a threat assessment inquiry: Does the student of concern pose a threat of targeted violence at school? If the threat assessment team concludes that:

- a. there is enough reliable information to answer the 11 key questions; and
- b. the weight of the information is convincing that the student *does not* pose a threat of targeted school violence; then
- c. the threat assessment team may conclude the threat assessment inquiry.

The threat assessment team may determine that closure of the inquiry is warranted, but conclude that the student, or previously suggested targets, need help coping with the behavior or problems that initially brought the threatening situation to the attention of authorities. In such situations, the team should work with school administrators and others to ensure that these individuals receive the

assistance and continued support that they may need. For example, if the student who was the focus of the threat assessment inquiry came to the attention of authorities because of behavior or communications that suggested that he or she was contemplating suicide, that student should be offered—and receive—appropriate counseling or other services. Likewise, if the threat assessment team concludes that the student was a victim of false allegations, the team may wish to consider recommending actions to deal with malicious accusers.