

**CONDUCTING IMPACT BASED RISK ASSESSMENTS FOR DETECTING & DISRUPTING ATTACK RELATED OR ATTACK BEHAVIORS IN K-12 SCHOOL SETTINGS**

**INDIANA SCHOOL SAFETY ACADEMY**

John Nicoletti, Ph.D., ABPP  
**Nicoletti-Flater Associates**  
 303-989-1617      www.nicoletti-flater.com

Facebook: Nicoletti-Flater Associates

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**EVALUATION CATEGORIES**

- Welfare Check
- Suicide Risk Assessment
- Mental Health Evaluation
- Psychological Fitness-for Duty Evaluations
- Violence Risk/Threat Assessment

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?**

Welfare Check	Mental Health Evaluation	PFFD	Suicide Risk Assessment
LEO Contact is made to determine current safety of an individual for whom others are concerned. Allows for immediate, professional intervention if individual is in current state of distress (or M1 if intent to harm self or others).	Mental Health Professional Usually conducted via mobile crisis, psychiatric unit in hospital, or outpatient clinic. Professional utilizes clinical interview (self-report), rarely along with collateral data, to determine safety (intent to harm self or others) of an individual. Used to precipitate hospitalization.	Psychological Fitness-for-Duty A PFFD is initiated when the employer has a reasonable belief, based on an employee's behavior, that cognitive, emotional, or psychological factors, which may include substance abuse: <i>Have interfered with the employee's ability to perform the essential functions of his/her job. Have caused the employee to be a direct threat to the safety of that employee, other employees, or the public.</i>	LEO/ MH Professional Questions include: -Passive vs. Active Suicidal Ideation -Method and access to weapons -Lethality -Location

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**WHY LOCATION?**

- If a person says that they are suicidal, and intends to commit suicide in a public place, school, or workplace, the potential for other direct or collateral victims is high. Therefore, a violence risk assessment must also be conducted.

**WHAT IS A VIOLENCE RISK/THREAT ASSESSMENT?**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

The purpose is to analyze both in vivo and virtual behaviors that have created social and/or psychological disruption, whether intended or not. The Risk/Threat Assessment collects information from multiple sources in order to arrive at a current risk determination. The data sources should include observable behaviors, verbal statements, written statements, social media activity, video games, etc. The Risk/Threat Assessment is not intended as a medical or psychiatric evaluation and as a result, no mental diagnosis is provided. The assessment should also include countermeasures for disruption of the concerning behaviors.

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## WHAT ARE THE CATEGORIES OF RISKS?

- A risk for Proactive Attack Behaviors against people or property
- A risk for Reactive Attack Behaviors against people or property
- A risk for behaviors that create Social and Psychological Disruption

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## OUTCOME OPTIONS

- True Positive
- True Negative
- False Negative
- False Positive

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## FOUR TIME CONSIDERATIONS

- Pre-Event Threshold
  - What you do to prevent an attack
- Event Threshold
  - What you do when they get on your radar
- Event Horizon
  - What you do when they attack
- Post-Event Horizon
  - What you do after an attack/effects of an attack

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## WHO ARE THE ATTACKERS?

- Insider – Individuals who are on your radar before they attack.
- Outsider – Individuals who are not on your radar before they attack.

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## SPECIFICALLY, WHO ARE THE INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS?

- Employees
- Ex-Employees
- Students
- Ex-Students
- Parents
- Random community members
- Contractors
- Others

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## CONSIDERATIONS IN DEALING WITH AN INSIDER THREAT

There is plenty of time between the event threshold and the event horizon to disrupt the behavior.

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**The probability of a violent incident from an insider should be low.**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## BASIC SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS IN PREVENTING & DISRUPTING A VOLATILE ATTACK

- Development of Policies, Procedures, & Protocols for Threats & Violence
- Development of a Centralized Data Collection Point (VORTEX)
- Target Hardening
- Activation of Dynamic Countermeasures

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**WHAT DOES NOT WORK IN CONDUCTING A RISK ASSESSMENT?**

4/20/2016

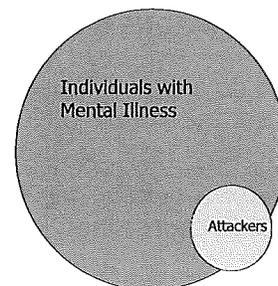
© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## FOCUSING ON WHO INSTEAD OF WHAT

- What is a 'who' ?
  - Mental Health Diagnosis (i.e., psychotic, bipolar, PTSD, sociopath etc.).
  - Ethnicity
  - Gender
  - Religious Affiliation
  - Political Affiliation
  - Other Affiliations (i.e., Greenpeace, Code Pink, PEAT)

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates



4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**CONDUCTING A STAND-ALONE MENTAL HEALTH EVALUATION OR A STAND-ALONE SUICIDE RISK ASSESSMENT**

4/20/2016

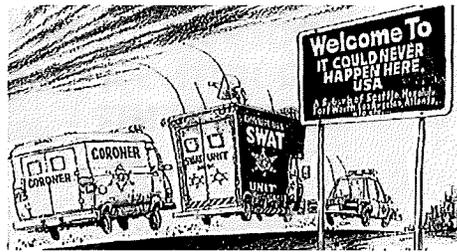
© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**NOT UTILIZING A STANDARDIZED RATING OR ASSESSMENT SYSTEM.**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

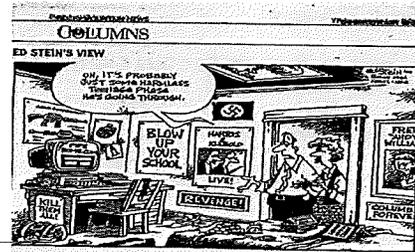
**DENIAL**



4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**RATIONALIZATION -- Inserting 'JUST' in the behavioral description**



4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**MORE REASONS & EXCUSES**

- Afraid to do anything because they might "set the person off"
- Assuming that the potential perpetrator is getting help because he/she is in counseling

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**AVENGERS ALWAYS HAVE A PROGRESSION**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

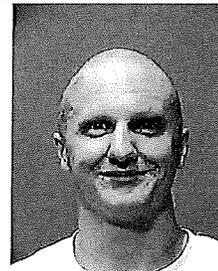
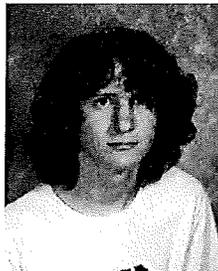
**HOW DO YOU GO FROM POINT A TO POINT Z?**



4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**HOW DO YOU GO FROM POINT A TO POINT Z?**



4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

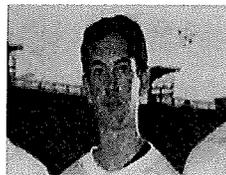
**HOW DO YOU GO FROM POINT A TO POINT Z?**



4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**HOW DO YOU GO FROM POINT A TO POINT Z?**



4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**DEVELOPMENT OF AN AVENGER**

- Perceived Injustice
- Feeling Victimized
- Externalization of Responsibility
- Development of a Grudge
- Obsessed with Avenging
- Avenging Action (lethal pathways v non-lethal)

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**AVENGERS ALWAYS  
BROADCAST AHEAD OF  
TIME.**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**HOW DO THEY  
BROADCAST IT?**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates



4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates



4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**THE EVENT THRESHOLD  
PHASE**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**BEHAVIORAL CODING OPTIONS:**

- Normal Behaviors
- Boundary Probing Behaviors
- Attack Related Behaviors
- Attack Behaviors

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## NORMAL BEHAVIORS

- Must be defined according to:
  - The specific environment
  - The individual
  - The event
- In reality, “normal behaviors” refer to behaviors that are accepted and tolerated by the corresponding environment.
- There cannot be any universal definition of “normal behaviors.”

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## BOUNDARY PROBING

- Involves pushing rules, regulations and tolerance levels.
- The purpose is to determine how much he/she can get away with.

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## IMPORTANT ISSUE

**IF YOU ALLOW A  
BOUNDARY PROBE TO  
OCCUR WITHOUT A  
DISRUPTER, THEN BY  
DEFAULT THAT BEHAVIOR  
BECOMES NORMAL.**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## IMPORTANT ISSUE

**If you only engage in  
'observation' of a boundary  
probe or attack related  
behavior, then by default it is  
reinforcing that behavior.**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## ATTACK RELATED BEHAVIORS

- **Desensitization Behaviors (threat making – direct, veiled, conditional)**
  - In Vivo
  - Virtual
- **Dehumanization Behaviors**
  - In Vivo
  - Virtual

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**HIPAA &  
CONFIDENTIALITY ISSUES  
versus  
DUTY TO WARN /  
DUTY TO PROTECT**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## **SB213/ CLAIRE DAVIS SCHOOL SAFETY ACT**

- Prior to this bill, schools could not be sued for negligence because they were a government entity
- This act holds schools liable for student and employee safety, and allows victims of school incidents the right to sue for negligence
- Schools must provide "reasonable care" from harm that is reasonably foreseeable
- Signed into law June 3, 2015 but no monetary compensation for damages until 2017 (discovery only).

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## **ATTACK RELATED BEHAVIORS**

- **Skill Set Building**
- **Development of an Armament Inventory**
- **Development of an Attack Plan**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## **ATTACK BEHAVIORS**

- **People**
- **Property**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## **ACTIVATION OF COUNTERMEASURES**

**Always Interrupt / Disrupt  
the Behavior**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## **TREES CATEGORIES (Disrupters)**

- CATEGORY I  
QUESTIONING
- CATEGORY II  
CONFRONTING
- CATEGORY III  
CONSEQUENCES

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## **INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS TO TREES**

WHEN A TREE IS PLACED AFTER A PRACTICE  
SESSION THE INDIVIDUAL HAS A CHOICE TO  
EITHER

- BACK OFF
- OR
- CLIMB OVER IT

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## **PREDICTING FUTURE VIOLENCE**

The best predictor of future behavior is not past behavior but post-intervention behavior.

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## **INTERPRETING LACK OF COMPLIANCE**

If the concerning behaviors continue after an intervention, then two possible hypotheses have been generated:

1. The individual is choosing to disregard rules when it suits him/her.
2. The individual does not have the capacity to control his/her actions.

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**IF YOU SEE SOMETHING/  
HEAR SOMETHING –  
  
SAY SOMETHING!**

51

**DON'T WORRY ALONE  
or  
MAKE UNILATERAL  
RISK ASSESSMENTS**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**UTILIZE A VORTEX**

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

## **IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION**

Once an individual has engaged in an attack-related behavior, he/she should always remain on the radar detector, even if the behavior appears to have stabilized.

4/20/2016

© Nicoletti-Flater Associates

**REVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE  
ARAPAHOE HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING  
REPORT**  
*JOHN NICOLETTI, PH.D., ABPP*

**INCIDENT OVERVIEW**

On September 3, 2013, a high school senior (hereinafter referred to as KP), was overheard threatening the life of the school debate coach at Arapahoe High School immediately following a meeting between KP, his mother, and the coach. KP voluntarily remained out of school for the next three days. A school threat assessment meeting was conducted regarding that threat on September 9, 2013. KP was allowed to return to school because he was thought to be a low level concern at that time. On December 13, 2013, at about 12:30 p.m., KP entered AHS with a pump action shotgun, a large hunting knife, several rounds of ammunition in bandoliers and backpack, a knife, and 3 improvised incendiary devices. He fired three rounds in the school hallway, shooting 17 year-old Claire Davis. He then ran a short distance down an intersecting hallway and entered the library, calling for the school debate coach who escaped through a door, as other students also escaped or hid from the attack. He lit and threw incendiary devices, setting fire to books and a bookcase. When officers entered the library a few minutes later, they found that KP had taken his own life with a self-inflicted gunshot. Claire died of her injuries eight days later on December 21, 2013.

- GOALS OF THE REPORT**
- Assess and disseminate findings and recommendations primarily from the discovery process in the investigatory arbitration between the Davis family and the Littleton Public Schools (LPS) resulting from the shooting incident at Arapahoe High School on December 13, 2013.
  - Examine a variety of the psychological safety and threat assessment practices in the Littleton Public School District (LPS) and specifically at Arapahoe High School (AHS).
  - Provide recommendations to improve practices in the Littleton Public Schools and to those designed for others to gain knowledge of the "lessons learned" and review their own practices with the goal of continual improvement in school safety.
  - Provide information for improved practices to the Littleton Public Schools, its students and staff, and to all those who work in a variety of ways to make schools safe and to enhance the wellbeing of students and staff in Colorado and around the country.

- MAJOR FINDINGS**
- Gaps identified:
    - Communication and reporting
    - Threat assessment process
    - Threat management
  - Significant amount of available data not utilized:
    - Was not made available to threat assessment team on September 9<sup>th</sup>
    - Was not recognized as a concern by detectors nor reported in any way
    - Not utilized appropriately during decision making process at school
  - Behavior needs to be looked at over time, in combination, and not as just isolated events

- COMMUNICATION GAPS**
- Teachers and staff did not appear to have a standard protocol for identifying and reporting concerning behavior.
  - Some teachers would consider KPs action as concerning while other teachers did not have the same perception.
  - Teachers and staff would discuss concerning behaviors with each other but they did not necessarily report it to the threat team.
  - Law enforcement in different agencies did not communicate behaviors of concern to each other.
  - Parents did not report all behaviors of concern or history of weapons training.
  - No communication between community treatment providers and school.

- THREAT ASSESSMENT GAPS**
- There did not appear to be a formalized vortex for reporting behaviors of concern. Therefore, nobody had all the data points which would cause individuals to view KPs behaviors as a series of isolated events.
  - There was no pattern recognition of KPs behavioral escalation.
  - Many of KP's concerning behaviors were not followed up on and were never presented to the team. For example, KP showing up at practice when he was directed not to, inappropriate comments to students and in classes, suspected to be viewing guns, and the SRO did not interview parents or KP.
  - There were multiple untapped data sources that would have been valuable in the determination of risk. For example, other students, teachers, and there was no release of information received from parents to speak to therapist.
  - All steps of the threat assessment process outlined by LPS do not appear to have been completed in the case in question.

## THREAT MANAGEMENT GAPS

- There did not appear to be a standardized protocol for development and implementation of actions (countermeasures) in the follow-up plan that was developed.
- Many of the earlier and post assessment meeting countermeasures appeared to be ineffective.
- The countermeasures were not coordinated with family and other community stakeholders, such as therapists, due to the inability to obtain a release from parents to exchange information.
- There appeared to be a circular logic regarding the threat management and data gathering for the assessment: KP was deemed low risk using insufficient data that was gathered, and the additional data was not gathered because KP was deemed low risk.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Faculty and staff need to be trained on a standard protocol to improve understanding of detecting and reporting concerning behaviors.
- Students need to be trained on what to look for regarding concerning behaviors and how and where to report concerning behaviors.
- There should be several options for reporting of concerning behaviors such as school staff, school security, Safe2Tell, School Resource Officers, counselors, etc.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Unilateral risk assessment should be avoided. If you see something or hear something-say something!
- All data should be directed to the school vortex.
- Data should be collected from multiple sources within and outside of the school including social media.
- Concerning actions should all be described in behavioral terms.
- The school threat assessment team should have a core membership of administration, mental health, and law enforcement. *Everyone needs to be trained.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Good threat assessment also involves good threat management.
- Any concerning behaviors should have an attached countermeasure.
- Each countermeasure should *be monitored for effectiveness and changed if proven to be ineffective.* Look at behaviors over time.
- Threat assessment forms should be standardized, completed in detail, and legible.
- Threat assessment team members should avoid diagnosing emotions and focus on the behavioral spectrum.

## COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL SAFETY

- Starts with prevention, awareness & reporting,
- Provides for students' mental health, early detection and early intervention,
- Integrates physical safety and security and psychological safety, and
- Engages schools, families, law enforcement, community treatment providers & other community agencies as partners.

*It is ALL of our efforts that will increase the likelihood of success in preventing school violence and keep our schools and communities safe.*

