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School Practitioner Listserv

A Weekly Community of Practice Network for Sharing and Interchange

Mental Health in Schools
UCLA
Center
Program and Policy Analysis+

July 28, 2014

Request

>About threat assessment

Follow-up

>About Mentor Programs:
- *What are best practices?*
- *Content for mentors to promote social-emotional development?*

Featured Center Resource

>Updating the *Gateway to a World of Resources*

##
Please forward this to a few colleagues you think might be interested.
The more who join, the more we are likely to receive to share.

For those who have been forwarded this and want to be part of
the weekly exchange, send an email to **Ltaylor@ucla.edu**
##

Request

Request

"Our District is in the process of writing a grant to establish a threat assessment team district wide. This team would include a follow up piece to assist the student and family with the mental health/psycho-educational interventions necessary based on the team's evaluation of the student. Can you please share with us what research is available that shows that threat assessment teams are effective? Any leads you have to us conducting this research would be beneficial."

Center Response

Schools concerned with threat assessment should start by reviewing:

>*Confronting Violence in Our Schools* (by Dewey Cornell)
   https://www.apa.org/about/gr/issues/violence/virginia-model.pdf

Here is an excerpt from the conclusion of the article:

"Threat assessment should be considered a component of a comprehensive approach toward maintaining a safe school. Threat assessment identifies students who may be in need of additional services as well as more general problems in the school environment, such as bullying, that merit broader attention. ....
   More broadly, the foundation for a safe school rests on the creation of a caring community where students feel safe and secure. Safety and security derive from two conditions:
   (1) an orderly, predictable environment where school staff provide consistent, reliable supervision and discipline; and
   (2) a school climate where students feel connected to the school and supported by their teachers and other school staff. A balance of structure and support is essential, and requires an organized, schoolwide approach that is practiced by all school personnel...."

With specific respect to threat assessment teams, see the except from *Confronting Violence in Our Schools* that is Appended to this *Practitioner*.

As is widely known, our Center at UCLA promotes thinking about problems experienced at school within the context of a unified and comprehensive system of student and learning supports. Within that framework, threat assessment falls within the *arena of crisis response and prevention* and along an *intervention continuum* that responds to, minimizes the impact of, and prevents school and personal crises. This requires school-wide and classroom-based approaches for (a) promotion and prevention of crises (e.g., enhancing a supportive, caring school environment and assessing whether students feel supported, facilitating social-emotional learning), (b) intervening as soon as problems arise (e.g., dealing with bullying, verbal threats, etc.), and (c) ensuring severe and chronic problems are continuously addressed (especially those involving students who are disconnected from peers and adults at school).

For more on threat assessment, see the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find on:
Threat Assessment: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/threatassessment.html

The *Threat Assessment* Quick Find provides links to online documents from across the country. See, for example:

>*Threat assessment and school violence mitigation*
   http://www.psych-insight.com/index.html

>*Evaluating Risk for Targeted Violence in Schools: Comparing Risk Assessment, Threat Assessment, And Other Approaches*
   http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ntac_threat_postpress.pdf

>*Threat Assessment In Schools*
   http://www.secretservice.gov/ntac/ssi_guide.pdf

>*Threat assessment: Predicting and preventing school violence*
   http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/threatassess_fs.aspx

Also see the Quick Find on: *Safe Schools and Violence Prevention*
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2108_03.htm and take a look at:
   >*Crisis Assistance and Prevention: A Self-study Survey*
      http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/crisissurvey.pdf

Listserv Participants

Please share views and experiences about threat assessment; send to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Follow up
>About mentor programs

A colleague at a state mentoring office indicated that the response to this request made in the last *Practitioner* provided a good perspective and good resources and noted the following:.

"From the CASEL list I do not see any mentoring programs. If there are any on that list that you know of, please point them out. It may be that there is not a mentoring model out there with proven success in all the outcome areas this person is interested in. I know that most mentoring programs claim social-emotional competence as one of their intended outcomes, but also know most grassroots organizations and even some larger, more established programs, do not evaluate their programs well and so it's not always clear how mentoring is helping youth develop these skills.
   If I were to consult with this person I would also encourage him to narrow his focus. A program that intends to do all of the following may find it difficult to do all of those well or to measure success on each. The requestor said: 'teaching life skills, developing students social-emotional competence and self-regulation, reducing suspension and expulsion rates and connecting children to school and community and preparing students for college/career.' I would suggest they have

no more than three outcome areas and develop/find appropriate tools to measure improvement in those three areas. Or to think more about short term (self-regulation, social-emotional competence), intermediary (life skills, reduced suspension rates) and long-term goals (preparation for college/career). A logic model would help with that.

　　Glad to know there is someone at UCLA providing this kind of support to mentoring programs! I know there is some interest in starting a California Mentoring Partnership within the MENTOR network. Have you heard anything about that?"

Center Response

CASEL includes mentoring in its various practices – see, for example: http://www.casel.org/collaborating-districts/chicago-public-schools/ .

As to the California Mentoring Partnership, others would certainly like to hear more so please share.

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Center featured resource
>Updating the Center's *Gateway to a World of Resources*

The homepage on the Center's website provides a direct link to a special feature called *Gateway to a World or Resources for Enhancing MH in Schools*. The Gateway is a links "map" enabling quick access to resources from relevant centers, associations, and organizations that offer supports for students, families, and schools. The map represents the next generation (beyond lists of links) for guiding users quickly to sites that are most likely to meet their needs and can aid in analyzing strengths, weaknesses, and gaps/inequities in available resources. It is also meant as a guide to facilitate various forms of networking among those with overlapping interests related to mental health in schools.

The Gateway is organized into five groupings:

　I. Comprehensive Focus on Mental Health in Schools
　II. Concerns Related to Children's Severe Mental Health Disorders
　III. Concerns Related to Children's Psychosocial Problems
　IV. Positive Social/Emotional Development &
　　　Prevention of Psychosocial/MH Problems
　V. Others Focused on Addressing Barriers to Learning and Development

Within each of grouping, the following are categorized:

- Major Centers/Networks/Initiatives/Projects/Consumer Info Resources (Major resources for information, services, and/or public education
- Associations (National organizations whose mission focuses on issues related to MH in schools. State and local associations can often be located through the national association website)
- Government Agencies (Major federal government resources for information, services, and/or public education)

- Listservs (Email discussion groups whose main focus is on matters relevant to MH in schools)
- E-Journals & Newsletters (Electronic Journals (or E-Journals) are versions of print journals that are available online or periodicals distributed through the internet)

Finally, within each category, websites are clustered according to the concentration of immediate resources available to the user. In most cases, only two groupings are provided at this time. In a few instances, three groupings were created. These are color coded, with the top grouping alway representing sites with the highest concentration of information, resource materials, published documents, number of links, etc.

As with all our resources, we want to continuously improve the Gateway. So if you have ideas about changes, additions, deletions, etc., please send your suggestions to ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Appendix

Here is an excerpt from *Confronting Violence in Our Schools* by Dewey Cornell related to threat assessment teams – https://www.apa.org/about/gr/issues/violence/virginia-model.pdf

"...Threat assessment teams were trained in each school. The teams were led by the principal or assistant principal and typically included a school counselor, a school psychologist, and a school resource officer. (The team composition can be adapted to meet the staffing patterns for different schools, and may include other disciplines as well.) Teams followed a seven-step decision tree. The initial stages of a threat assessment are typically handled by the team leader (principal) and many cases can be readily resolved. In more complex or ambiguous cases, the team leader brings in additional team members. The seven steps will be reviewed briefly here (See figure on page 6; Cornell & Sheras, 2006).

1. At step one, the leader of the threat assessment team interviews the student who made the threat, using a standard set of questions. The principal also interviews the recipient of the threat and any witnesses. The principal is not concerned simply with what the student said or did, but the context in which the threat was made and what the student intended by making the threat.
2. At step two, the principal must make an important distinction between transient threats, which are easily resolved because they are not serious threats, and substantive threats, which are serious in the sense that they pose a continuing risk or danger to others. Transient threats can be readily identified as expressions of anger or frustration (or perhaps inappropriate attempts at humor) that dissipate quickly when the student reflects on the meaning of what he or she has said. In contrast, substantive threats represent a sustained intent to harm someone beyond the immediate incident. If there is doubt whether a threat is transient or substantive, the threat is regarded as substantive. One way to identify a threat as substantive is to look for certain characteristics derived from the FBI report (O'Toole, 2000) that suggest that the threat is likely to be serious:
   - The threat includes plausible details, such as a specific victim, time, place, and method of assault;
   - The threat has been repeated over time or communicated to multiple persons;
   - The threat is reported as a plan, or planning has taken place;

- The student has accomplices, or has attempted to recruit accomplices;
- The student has invited an audience of peers to watch the threatened event; and
- There is physical evidence of intent to carry out the threat, such as a weapon or bomb materials.

3. A transient threat can be resolved quickly at step three without engaging the full team in a comprehensive threat assessment. The principal may require the student to apologize or explain to those affected by threat, or take other action to make amends for the student's behavior. The principal may also respond with a reprimand or other disciplinary consequence if the behavior was disruptive or violated the school's discipline code. If a transient threat was sparked by an argument or conflict, the principal can involve other team members in helping to address or resolve the problem.

4. If the threat is substantive, the principal skips step three and proceeds to step four. At step four, the substantive threat is determined to be serious or very serious. The distinction between serious and very serious threats is based on the intended severity of injury. A serious threat is a threat to assault, strike, or beat up someone. A very serious threat is a threat to kill, sexually assault, or severely injure someone. A threat involving the use of a weapon is generally considered a threat to severely injure someone.

5. In the case of a serious substantive threat, the team moves to step five and takes actions to protect potential victims. Protective actions depend on the circumstances of the threat, as well as how soon and where the threat might be carried out. Immediate protective actions include cautioning the student about the consequences of carrying out the threat and contacting the student's parents. The team also has the responsibility of notifying the intended victim of the threat.

6. Very serious threats require the most extensive action by the team. The team skips step five and moves to step six. Again the team takes immediate action to assure that the threat is not carried out, but in addition, the student should be suspended from school, pending a complete assessment of the threat and determination of the most appropriate school placement. The team conducts a more comprehensive safety evaluation that includes both a mental health and law enforcement component. The mental health assessment is conducted by the school psychologist or another suitably trained mental health professional and the law enforcement investigation is conducted by the school resource officer.

7. At step seven, the team integrates findings from the safety evaluation into a written safety plan. The safety plan is designed both to protect potential victims and to address the student's educational needs. At this point, the principal decides whether the student can return to school or should be placed in an alternative setting. If the student is permitted to return to school, the plan describes the conditions that must be met and the procedures in place to monitor the student when he or she returns...."

Please share relevant resources ideas, requests,
comments, and experiences!

Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu

Note: Responses come only to the
Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA for
possible inclusion in the next week's message.

We also post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net Exchange* **on our website at** http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm **and to the** *Facebook* **site (which can be accessed from the Center's website homepage** http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/