PREVENTING VIOLENCE AT AFTER-SCHOOL EVENTS

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CIRMA

Introduction

After-school events are an integral part of the American experience. Athletic events, theater performances, inter-scholastic debates, and other school-related community programs promote positive youth development and offer a safe space for families, students, and faculty to connect.

Unfortunately, the threat of violence on school campuses during after-school events continues to rise. According to the *K-12 School Shooting May 2023 Database,* 273 people were killed or wounded on school grounds from 303 gun-related incidents in 2022 alone, both of which were record highs.

Although school violence conjures up tragic and much-publicized events, it also includes more subtle and lingering behaviors that permeate everyday school life. Incidents of targeted violence in schools and at school-related functions are rarely impulsive. In contrast, violent attacks are often carefully planned plots for revenge. From a comprehensive *Secret Service and Department of Education* study, it was found that 93% of school shooters planned their attacks, and more than 75% of these violent offenders raised concerns from others before the attack.[1]

There are practical and effective strategies that can help identify and prevent violent attacks in our schools and communities. The data show that leaders who prioritize safety and security during the event planning process are better prepared to mitigate violence during after-school activities successfully.

Preventing a violent attack is far more effective than responding to one. This whitepaper provides pertinent best practices to help mitigate acts of violence perpetrated at after-school events through proper preparation, collaboration, risk identification and assessment, carefully planned operations, and clear and concise communication.

Background

Connecticut school districts must develop and submit to the state yearly an all-hazards plan that incorporates school security and safety *(Connecticut General Statute 10-222n[2]).* Since this law was passed in 2013, Connecticut school districts have been required to involve local officials, including the

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[1] https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/blog/gun-violence/facts-about-gun-violence-and-school-shootings/

[2] https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_170.htm#sec_10-222n

municipality's chief executive officer, the superintendent of schools, law enforcement, fire, public health, emergency management, and emergency medical services, in the safety planning process.

Several Public Acts have been passed and enacted throughout the years, requiring additional plans to be developed by district leadership. **For instance,** *Public Act 21-97*[3] **requires local and regional boards of education to create and implement an emergency action plan** for responding to severe and life-threatening sports-related injuries during interscholastic and intramural athletic events.

Under Public Act 21-97, schools must identify all individuals responsible for implementing the emergency action plan, describe each person's responsibilities under the plan, and list resources available to assist in responding to the emergency.

> Maintaining **safe environments** and **programs** is **everyone's responsibility.**

Collaboration

Per the tenets of the *All-Hazards Planning Approach*, the safety of our school community is not the responsibility of one individual. **Maintaining safe environments and programs is everyone's responsibility.** Thus, all levels of the school community should be involved in planning after-school events, including:

- School principals
- Athletic Directors
- Counselors
- Teachers / Coaches
- School law enforcement unit officials
- Local law enforcement personnel
- Medical professionals
- Mental health professionals

Each school community member listed above brings unique expertise and insight into the various risks faced during after-school events. **Engaging these individuals during the planning phase will give the school a holistic understanding of the resources available to keep students, staff, and patrons safe.**

Risk Identification and Assessment

Data show that a perpetrator does not just wake up and decide to commit a violent act on a whim. As mentioned earlier in this whitepaper, the Secret Service and Department of Education found that 93% of school shooters planned the attack, and more than 75% of these violent offenders raised concerns from others before the attack. Furthermore, almost all mass school shooters shared threatening or concerning messages and imagery. In four out of five of these events, at least one other person knew the attacker's plan but failed to report it.

Frederick Calhoun and Steve Weston developed the *Pathway to Violence* **model in 2003** (see page 3). Their findings were determined through observations from decades of research on targeted violence. Ultimately, the concept recognizes no known threat profile based on a perpetrator's physical features. Instead, **the model illustrates that most perpetrators share behavioral and psychological characteristics recognizable to a third-party before the attack.**

According to the model, **the pathway leading to an attack is often initiated through a grievance**. Grievances can sometimes be personal, such as being fired from a job, bullying, or experiencing rejection from a friend or romantic interest. Grievances can also, at times, be more general, like prejudices felt by a group the attacker is a part of or wants to be a part of. **In a Federal Bureau of Investigation study**[4] **study on pre-attack behaviors, four out of five active shooters had a grievance before carrying out their attacks.**

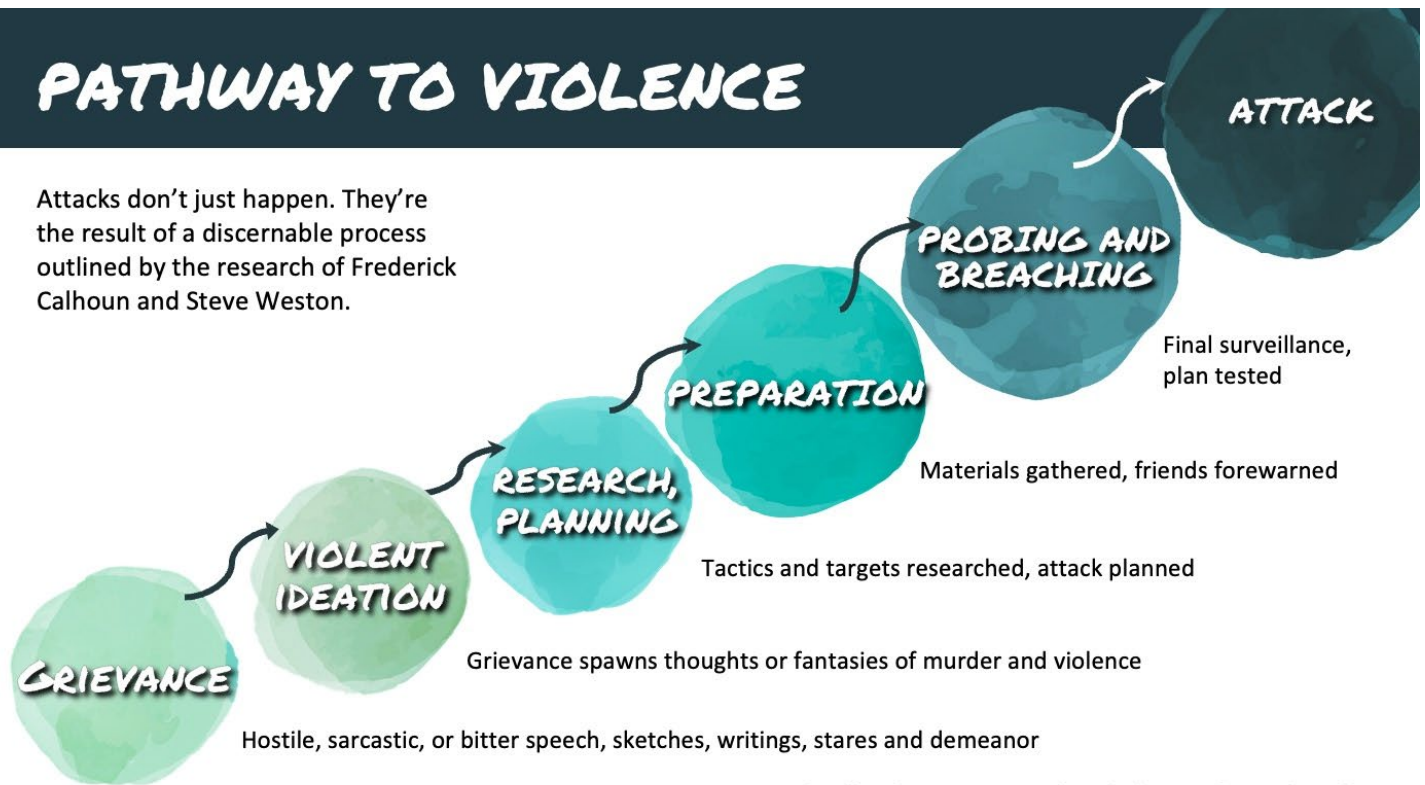There are numerous ways grievances can be exhibited, such as:

- Hostile, sarcastic, or bitter speech
- Inappropriate jokes, sketches and drawings, writings, and other means of expression

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[3] https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/ACT/PA/PDF/2021PA-00092-R00HB-06534-PA.PDF

[4] https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/pre-attack-behaviors-of-active-shooters-in-us-2000-2013.pdf/view

PATHWAY TO VIOLENCE

Attacks don't just happen. They're the result of a discernable process outlined by the research of Frederick Calhoun and Steve Weston.

GRIEVANCE
Hostile, sarcastic, or bitter speech, sketches, writings, stares and demeanor

VIOLENT IDEATION
Grievance spawns thoughts or fantasies of murder and violence

RESEARCH, PLANNING
Tactics and targets researched, attack planned

PREPARATION
Materials gathered, friends forewarned

PROBING AND BREACHING
Final surveillance, plan tested

ATTACK

Adapted from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security © Copyright Stratfor 2020

- Types of books read, websites visited, social media channels or feeds that are participated in[5]

The second step of the pathway to violence is violent ideations, where the person with a grievance begins to experience thoughts or fantasies about violence or murder towards a person or group they have the grievance against. Sometimes, the person will share their violent ideations; when this happens, it is called a *leakage*. Leakages can occur through in-person conversations, online forums, emails, or letters.

After the perpetrator moves past violent ideations and decides to attack, they begin the behaviors and activities associated with the attack. This includes identifying and selecting their target, planning and preparing for the attack, which may consist of acquiring weapons, visiting the potential attack site, and finally, the actual attack.

Not every person with a grievance will go on to become an attacker. However, every person exhibiting concerning behavior related to a grievance must be taken seriously and assessed to determine whether they pose a real threat. **At this juncture, the team detailed in the *Collaboration* section of this whitepaper becomes vitally important.**

> **...every person exhibiting concerning behavior** related to a grievance **must be taken seriously** and accessed to determine **whether they pose a real threat.**

School districts should also consider how school and law enforcement leadership become aware of possible grievances, violent ideations, or threat actors. Consider determining if the school promotes anonymous reporting platforms. Furthermore, school and community leaders should work with law enforcement and other state and federal agencies to assess if concerning conduct is being perpetrated via online platforms.

In the *Background* section of this whitepaper, you will find an overview of various Connecticut state laws requiring the risk identification and assessment of hazards impacting school communities. Each Hazard Plan must be reviewed annually and updated when necessary; it should also be rehearsed regularly.

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5   https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/pre-attack-behaviors-of-active-shooters-in-us-2000-2013.pdf/view

Any school employee identified with a role in the Hazard Plan must be properly licensed according to the tasks described in their role descriptions. The Plan must be distributed to all employees identified with roles within it and posted at all facilities where after-school events will occur. The Plan should also be accessible online.

The collaborative team creating the All-Hazard School Security and Safety Plan should identify risks and assess their potential for adverse outcomes. The team should also develop a procedure for responding to each situation.

Operations

Before, during, and post-event day, specific procedures and protocols should be implemented, communicated, and understood by those involved in the event's operations.

First, it's essential to determine the event facility perimeter to identify potential risks. Work with your Safety Team, which should include local law enforcement in some capacity, to determine the most significant possible risks for locating areas exposed to people and vehicles entering and exiting the facility.

Referring back to the *Pathway to Violence* **model, the research and planning phase could involve the perpetrator visiting the area of the planned attack before it's executed.** Awareness of surrounding areas is also essential, as incidents that occur locally could impact or disrupt your school's event. Conducting pre-event and event-day visual inspections will help identify possible threats. It is recommended that you work with law enforcement and utilize their expertise in event location and perimeter monitoring.

Managing event traffic should be carefully coordinated before the event. A few things to consider are:

- Establishing perimeters for parking
- Ensuring proper lighting in the parking areas
- Installing fixed or mobile barriers around the venue to control the flow of traffic and prevent vehicles from entering pedestrian areas
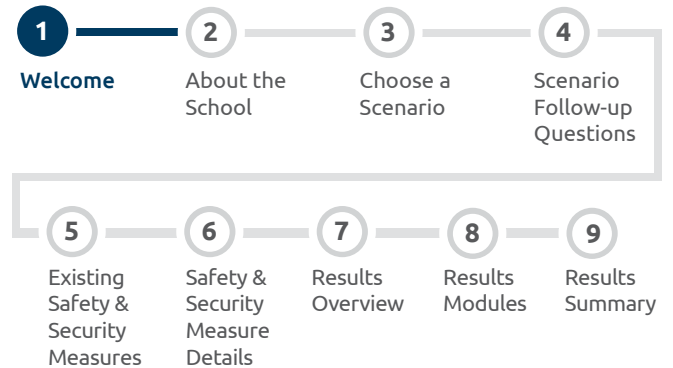- Patrolling lots from the time they open until they close

The *Department of Homeland Security (DHS)* has been working to address *Soft Targets and Crowded Places (ST-CPs)* security and preparedness for many years. ST-CPs include sports venues, shopping venues, schools, and transportation systems. After-school events are considered *soft targets* because they are easily accessible to many people and have limited security or protective measures. *Hard targets* are places that are well protected with access controls in place, like airports, government buildings, or nuclear facilities.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security Soft Targets and Crowded Places Security Plan Overview
May 2018
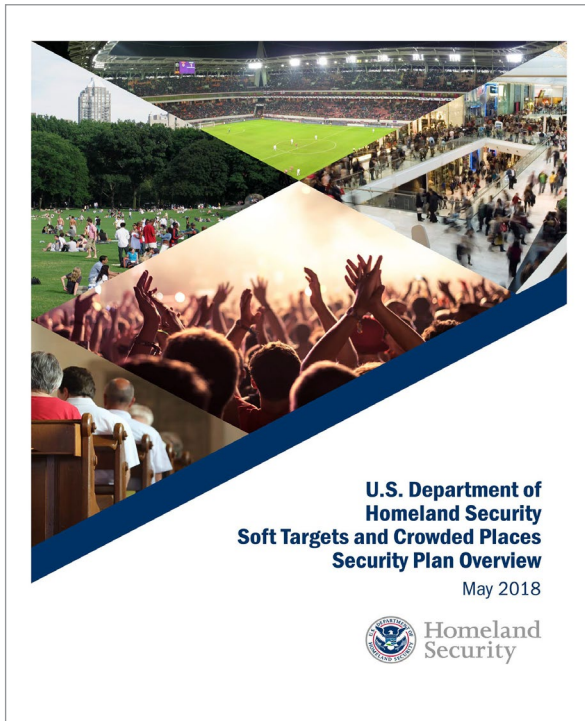
Homeland Security

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), part of the *U.S. Department of Homeland Security,* created a [K-12 School Security Assessment Tool (SSAT)](). The *SSAT* is designed to assist with your safety and security planning by looking at what security measures and supports are in place currently and where improvements can be made to improve the safety and security of your school community. The tool reviews various components of a school's (or school activity location's) physical security system, including equipment and technology, site and building design features, school security personnel, policies and procedures related to school security, and training, exercises, and drills.

The *SSAT* will provide recommendations for actions that can be taken to improve your security policies and procedures.

School Security Assessment Tool (SSAT)

1 Welcome

2 About the School

3 Choose a Scenario

4 Scenario Follow-up Questions

5 Existing Safety & Security Measures

6 Safety & Security Measure Details

7 Results Overview

8 Results Modules

9 Results Summary

Establishing an effective communication structure and ensuring all communications are presented in clear, concise language is vital. During your pre-event safety meetings, it's also vital to identify a chain of command that clearly defines hierarchy, communication roles, and responsibilities. Establishing responsibilities and communication structures will make the chaos more manageable if something occurs at an after-school event. Creating this command structure also includes establishing secondary lines of communication if the original assignee cannot take charge.

Reunification is a significant component of effective after-school event security. The *I Love U Guys Foundation* has created *Standard Response and Reunification Protocols* in collaboration with schools and first responders.

The Standard Response Protocol (SRP) is based on the response to any given situation, not individual scenarios. Like the Incident Command System (ICS), SRP demands a specific vocabulary but also allows for flexibility. The premise is simple - these five particular actions can be performed during an incident. When communicating these, the action is labeled with a "Term of Art" followed by a "Directive." **Examples include:**

- Hold: in your room, office, or area.

- Secure: Get inside. Lock outside doors.

- Lockdown: Locks, lights, out of sight.

- Evacuate: To a stated location.

- Shelter: State the hazard and the safety strategy. These strategies may include evacuating the shelter area,

sealing the room, dropping, covering, holding, or relocating to high ground.

The steps to the SRP must be modified for the specific location where the event is being held, so it's essential to review event logistics beforehand and clearly develop and communicate the specifics of each step.
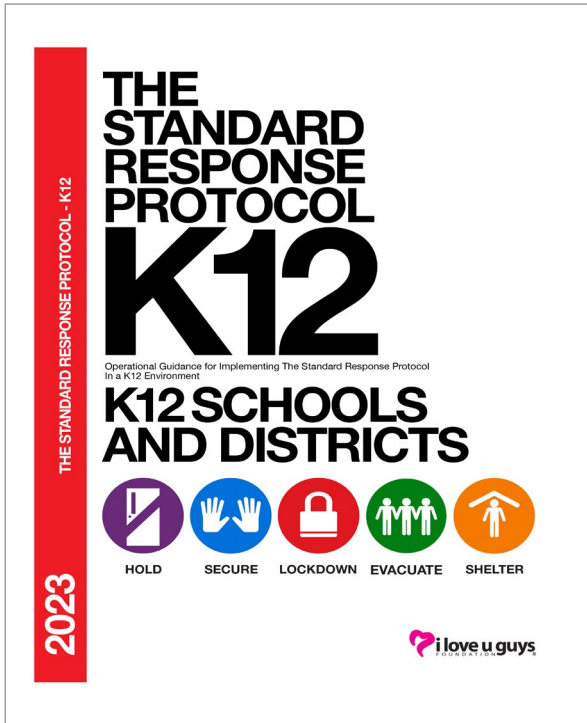
The *I Love U Guys Foundation* created *The Standard Reunification Method (SRM),* which safely reunites friends and families in an emergency—a critical aspect of crisis response. The *SRM* involves clear communication with the parents/ guardians of students and involves completing a reunification card for their child. It also includes essential information on who can pick up their student in an emergency and how to contact that person. This reunification card also contains instructions on what to do if an event occurs.

The *I Love U Guys Foundation* also created a sample *Memorandum of Understanding* to share with the community, families, and students to communicate details of the event and shelter site locations.[6] For more information on the *I Love U Guys Foundation*, visit www.iloveuguys.org

In Summary

To mitigate the risk of potential violent attacks at after-school events, **it is essential to consider the** *Pathway to Violence* **model to identify and prevent the attacks before they occur**. The constant communication of procedures, protocols, and expectations to all involved in the after-school event is also vital in keeping people as safe as possible.

Clear, consistent, and concise communication should be practiced between school leaders, teachers, students, local emergency services, parents, and the community. By involving all stakeholders, safety becomes a shared and deeply collaborative mission; *DHS* states, "An informed and empowered public is our greatest ally in DHS's work to enhance the security of *soft targets and crowded places,* or *ST-CPs.*"

> **Having clear and developed action plans** that are consistently **reviewed, updated, and shared is vital to preventing violent attacks.**

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6   https://iloveuguys.org/The-Standard-Reunification-Method.html

Having clear and developed action plans that are consistently reviewed, updated, and shared is vital to preventing violent attacks. Through resources such as local and state government websites, foundations specializing in security protocols like the *I Love U Guys Foundation*, the expertise of your local emergency responders, and others, numerous examples, templates, best practices, and other reference materials are available to assist you in developing safety protocols and procedures for your entity.

Utilizing the risk management process, including conducting risk mapping, will ensure the community's safety and the event's success and long-term sustain-ability.

Ready to get started? Contact your CIRMA Risk Management Team for assistance applying a holistic risk management approach to your entity's event operations, including completing critical risk mapping exercises.

About CIRMA

CIRMA was established as a Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) service program—Connecticut's association of towns and cities. Today, CIRMA is Connecticut's number-one municipal risk financing and risk management services provider for Connecticut's public entities. A member-owned and governed agency, CIRMA provides high-quality, tailored insurance for municipalities, school districts, and local public agencies. CIRMA operates competitive Workers' Compensation and Liability-Auto-Property pools and provides holistic claims services and risk management solutions exclusively to the Connecticut public sector.

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