

In *15-Minute Focus: Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management for K-12 Schools*, Dr. Melissa A. Louvar Reeves explains the interrelated factors that play a role in a person's decision to plan and carry out an act of violence.

Every year, stories about violence in schools make headlines around the world. And every year, questions surface: How could this have been prevented? What were the warning signs? What changes do we need to make in our schools and communities to prevent this from happening yet again?

This book will help answer those questions, as you learn about the factors that affect decision-making, and the role of Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) in managing students' troubling behaviors, mitigating risk for the school and community, and directing students onto more positive pathways.

In this book, you'll discover:

- Why schools should establish BTAM teams and protocols
- How to establish a BTAM team
- Identifying and reporting concerns
- Establishing protocols for evaluating threats
- How teachers, administrators, counselors and the community can work together to mitigate troubling behavior and ensure student success
- Ways to assist struggling students as they transition to adult life after high school

Educators, administrators, and school counselors have been trained on how to respond to a student who is suicidal or despondent. This book helps translate those skills to assist someone who is thinking about harming others.



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Working alongside experts in various fields of mental health, the *15-Minute Focus* series is designed to home in on a specific mental health topic, signs to look for, practical intervention and classroom management strategies, and effective ways to communicate and collaborate with internal staff, outside referrals, and student families.



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Introduction

Taylor is so excited to be back at school! She can feel the excitement in the air as there is some sense of hope that normalcy will return after months of alternating between in-person and virtual instruction. She senses an energy that she has not felt in months as excitement builds for the basketball game on Friday. But there is one exception. Jordan is typically a quiet yet friendly student, well-liked by others. While not the most popular, Jordan is certainly not considered an outcast. Lately, Jordan has been posting concerning social media posts that show increased anger and frustration with the division and fighting going on in our country, increased discontent with school, and themes of hopelessness and helplessness that things will never get back to normal. Today, Jordan is making little eye contact. Taylor tries to engage Jordan in a conversation about the basketball game and asks if Jordan will be going. Jordan's reply is, "I'm thinking about it, but there's stuff I need to take care of. People need to pay for hurting others." When Taylor asks what Jordan means, Jordan replies, "You'll find out soon enough. You're cool, but other people need to watch their back." At first, Taylor thinks nothing of these statements as kids "blow off steam" all the time. Yet, Taylor also remembers their advisory group discussion that talked about noticing when someone is struggling and the importance of telling a trusted adult and getting help. Is this one of those times? Something doesn't feel right...

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Targeted acts of violence at school are rare, but the impact is tremendous. While schools are supposed to be institutions focused on education, they are required to do so much more in regard to physical and psychological safety. The stress levels of our youth (and society in general) are at an all-time high. A recent study surveyed youth indicators of well-being. It showed that concerns about their present and future have increased, and upwards of 30 percent of young people say they have been feeling unhappy or depressed more often than not. They revealed more concern than



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What Is Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM)?

Behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) is a fact-based, systematic process designed to identify, assess, and manage potentially dangerous or violent situations. BTAM focuses on “targeted acts of violence,” which is defined as any “incident of violence where a known or knowable attacker selects a particular target prior to their violent attack.”⁸ The primary goal of school-based BTAM is to prevent the immediate risk of harm to others *and* engage resources and supports for the individual of concern. The United States Departments of Education, Justice, Secret Service, and Federal Bureau of Investigation, school safety experts, and law enforcement officials, have all cited research indicating that warning signs are usually evident before a student commits an act of violence on a school campus.^{9,10} When threat assessment teams are established and well-trained, implement the process with fidelity, and act responsibly regarding the concern, students are more likely to receive counseling services and a parent conference, and they are less likely to receive long-term suspension or an alternative placement.¹¹

There have been concerns that threat assessment leads to more students being placed into special education or the “school-to-prison” pipeline. This can occur when a threat assessment process is not used or when teams are not well trained. Research by Cornell

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Establish the Multi-Disciplinary Team

Step 1

Prior to conducting threat assessments, a multi-disciplinary BTAM team must be selected carefully and receive appropriate training. The size and resources of the school/district will impact which structure is best. The graphic below demonstrates the three main team structures that support a BTAM process.

