

Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

Fidelity of Implementation

Fidelity of implementation refers to the degree to which a program or practice is delivered as intended. Many evidence-based programs in the education, mental health, and social science fields that seemed effective when first tested, have yielded poor results when implemented on a larger scale in real-world conditions. This drop-off in quality of outcomes is usually attributed to a failure of practitioners to adhere to the program's standards. As a result, there is widespread interest throughout education in achieving high fidelity of implementation for any program or intervention. Programs are expected to have standard methods of measuring their fidelity of implementation.

At the same time there is scientific interest in fidelity, there are also increasing legal expectations that threat assessment be implemented with fidelity. Several examinations of school shootings (e.g., Arapahoe High School in Colorado, Margery Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, and Taft Union High School in California) found that school authorities failed to carry out their threat assessment programs properly. Among the shortcomings identified were teams with insufficient training, lack of administration involvement in the threat assessment process, failure of teams to follow their own procedures, failure to share new relevant threat information, and failure to monitor a case where there was ongoing concern.

The Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) has a process for measuring fidelity of implementation each year. There is ongoing research on this measure, so it is subject to improvement. In addition, we recognize that schools might customize their annual review to fit their school district needs.

We also recommend that coaches examine annual trends in student outcomes, preferably at a district-wide level, so that there are enough cases to reach statistically reliable conclusions. To examine equity and fairness of case outcomes, there should be an annual review of case data that includes student demographic characteristics, the nature of the threat made, the team's classification of the threat and intervention plan, disciplinary and legal consequences, and end-of-year academic status. This information will be compared across gender, grade, racial, ethnic, and SPED groups. The analysis of case data will also allow school authorities to identify trends that indicate service needs. Student outcome trends are important because of concern that students of color and students with disabilities might be subject to greater rates of school exclusion (e.g., out of school suspension, expulsion, school transfer) and law enforcement actions (e.g., arrest, court charges, incarceration) than non-Hispanic white students. This topic is addressed in several research reports that find overall fairness and equity in schools using CSTAG.

Fidelity Evaluation Tool

Fidelity evaluation can be conducted on Basic and Advanced levels. The Basic level of evaluation establishes the existence of a functioning threat assessment team in the schools. The Advanced level assesses more complex aspects of team functioning with input from all team members. Fidelity evaluation is being examined in a national study of CSTAG implementation. Updates will be disseminated when available.

Coaches may modify or abbreviate this tool to fit their needs. The primary goal is to develop a practice of annual review that facilitates improvement. A coach might identify other areas for improvement.

Basic Fidelity

Team Composition is measured by completing the 4 items below. For example, if a school has a complete team meeting all state and district requirements for membership, it receives 3 points. If one member of the team has not completed CSTAG training, the school receives 2 points. If the team has conducted at least three assessments, it receives 3 points, and if it meets three or more times, it receives 3 points. In this hypothetical example, the school obtains a total of 11 points.

TEAM COMPOSITION				
	0	1	2	3
1. Does the school have a complete threat assessment team, meeting state and district requirements for membership?	No team	Missing more than one member	Missing one member	Full team
2. How many of the team members have received training?	None	More than one without training	One without training	All have training
3. How many threat assessments has the team conducted during the school year?	None	One	Two	Three or more
4. How often does the team meet per semester?	Never	Once	Twice	Three or more
Total score = sum of items 1+2+3+4. _____				

Team functioning. To measure team functioning, the coach will conduct a more detailed review, typically obtaining information from the team for the items below. The coach will need to use some judgment in deciding if a standard is met. For example, to determine staff awareness, there might be written materials sent to all staff, or perhaps there is an educational program on threat assessment delivered to all staff, or a survey of staff that confirms their knowledge.

TEAM FUNCTIONING	
School Code of Conduct/ Written Policy	
School code of conduct states that...	0 or 1
1. Threats to harm others are a disciplinary violation.	
2. Threats are subject to graduated disciplinary consequences.	
3. Threats may or may not result in school suspension.	
4. Students making threats are subject to threat assessment.	
5. A threat assessment can include some form of safety evaluation or mental health assessment.	
6. Code of conduct shared with students.	
7. Code of conduct shared with parents.	
Staff Awareness	
All or nearly all members of the school staff (teachers, support personnel, bus drivers, custodial and cafeteria staff) are aware that...	0 or 1
1. School has a threat assessment team.	
2. Threats are to be reported to the administration or team.	
3. Threats do not result in immediate suspension; each case evaluated individually.	
4. The school takes a problem-solving approach to threats rather than a zero-tolerance approach.	

Threat Assessment Documentation	
	0 or 1
1. School maintains a written or digital record of threat cases.	
2. Team uses a standard form to document threat cases.	
3. The standard form was used in the most recent threat case known to this team member.	
4. The standard form was used in all threat cases this year (since team established) known to this team member.	
Team Process	
	0 or 1
1. The team has a designated leader who actually leads the team.	
2. Team members confer with one another on threat cases.	
3. The evaluation of a threat begins the same day that the threat is reported.	
4. The law enforcement representative is informed about threat cases that warrant his/her attention.	
5. Substantive threat cases are not conducted by one team member.	
6. Team members use the CSTAG model and its decision tree.	

Basic Fidelity Scoring	
Team composition	/12
Policy	/7
Staff awareness	/4
Documentation	/4
Team process	/6
TOTAL	/33

Another aspect of the fidelity evaluation is to assess team member accuracy in classifying threats. This exercise could be answered by each team member (most rigorous assessment) or by the team as a whole working together.

Please answer the following questions concerning your knowledge of CSTAG. What is the best answer?	
1.	A student tells you that a student named Jason has bragged that he is going to beat up a classmate after school. Jason denies making the threat and says the student is just trying to get him in trouble. You are not sure who is telling the truth. Assuming you do not learn anything else that would change your assessment, how would you classify this threat?
	a. No threat
	b. Transient threat
	c. Serious substantive threat
	d. Very serious substantive threat
2.	A student writes an essay for English class in which he describes a bloody scene from a battle. The student portrays himself as a soldier shooting several enemies. Assuming you do not learn anything else that would change your assessment, how would you classify this threat?
	a. No threat
	b. Transient threat
	c. Serious substantive threat
	d. Very serious substantive threat
3.	A student says he is going to stab another student. The two have a history of conflict. The student and his locker are searched and no knife is found. The student refuses to apologize, but says he does not mean what he said. The student refuses an offer to mediate the conflict. Assuming you do not learn anything else that would change your assessment, how would you classify this threat?
	a. No threat
	b. Transient threat
	c. Serious substantive threat
	d. Very serious substantive threat
4.	A student gets in an argument and says he is going to shoot a classmate. The student later apologizes and says he has no intention of harming his classmate. He says that he was upset and should not have threatened to shoot anyone. Assuming you do not learn anything else that would change your assessment, how would you classify the threat?
	a. No threat
	b. Transient threat
	c. Serious substantive threat
	d. Very serious substantive threat
5.	In the case of a very serious substantive threat, the first priority is:
	a. Clarify that the student has no intention to carry out the threat.
	b. Contact the student's parents.
	c. Suspend the student.
	d. Take precautions to protect potential victims.

Correct answers 1c, 2a, 3d, 4b, 5d