

## VIOLENCE THREAT / RISK ASSESSMENT (V-TRA) PROTOCOL

### Background

Respect for self and others, contributing to the common good, accepting accountability for one's own actions, seeking and granting forgiveness, acting morally and legally as a person formed in the Catholic tradition, and the promotion of self-discipline are behaviours integral to fulfilling the mission of Holy Spirit Catholic Schools. It is from this foundation that a distinctive vision of the call for desired behaviours of students, staff and parents within our Catholic schools develops and emerges.

As Pope John Paul II reminds us:

*Community is at the heart of all Catholic education, not simply as a concept to be taught, but a reality to be lived.*

*(To Teach as Jesus Did, 1972, #23)*

Holy Spirit Catholic Schools is committed to creating and maintaining an environment in schools where students, staff, parents and others feel safe. To this end, the following protocol shall be used for responding to student threats/high-risk behaviours.

### Definitions

**“High-risk behaviours”** include, but are not limited to, possession of weapons, bomb threats, threats to kill or injure others and fire setting. Threats may be written, verbal, posted on the Internet or made by gesture. They may be direct, indirect, conditional or veiled. All high-risk student behaviours, as defined, shall be reported to the Principal, who will activate the protocol for the Stage 1 assessment. High-risk behaviours are those of students twelve (12) years of age and older who are believed to have contravened Section 264.1(1) of the Criminal Code of Canada, which states that a person “who in any manner, knowingly utters, conveys or causes any person to receive a threat to cause death or bodily harm” has committed an offense.

**“Immediate risk situations”** are those situations involving high risk that require immediate police intervention and a protective school response. An example would be when a student is making a threat and is in possession of a weapon.

**“Worrisome behaviours”** are those that cause concern for members of the school system indicating that a student is moving toward a greater risk of violent behaviour. This may include drawing pictures, writing stories or making vague statements that do not, of themselves, constitute “uttering threats” as defined by law but are causing concern for some members of the school community because of their violent content.

**Stage 1 Violence-Threat Risk Assessment Team (School Threat Assessment Team (STAT))** is composed of the Principal (or designate), the family school liaison counsellor or school-based counsellor, and a police officer and may also include the classroom teacher and/or special education liaison when involving a student with special needs. The primary purpose of the Stage I V-TRA is data collection and initiation of immediate risk reduction interventions.

**Stage 2 Violence-Threat Risk Assessment Team, (Community Threat Assessment (CTAT))** is recommended by STAT-I when a more comprehensive response including risk evaluation, long-term intervention and treatment planning are needed. The Director of Support Services will be contacted to initiate expansion of the team to include mental health services professionals, physicians, child protection staff and others.

## Procedures

1. Reporting
  - 1.1 Any person in a school having knowledge of high-risk student behaviour, or having reasonable grounds to believe there is a potential for high-risk behaviour, will immediately report the information to the Principal and/or designate.
  - 1.2 No action shall be taken against a person who makes a report unless it is made maliciously or without reasonable grounds.
  - 1.3 In cases where a report is made maliciously, the person shall be dealt with according to division procedure and the law, where applicable.
2. Fair Notice
  - 2.1 Prior to any threat/risk assessment protocol being implemented, all students, staff and parents shall be provided with information about the protocol and procedures so that "fair notice" is given that threat behaviour will not be tolerated (see attached "Fair Notice Letter").
  - 2.2 The Director of Support Services will take the lead to ensure that students, staff and parents are aware of the protocol and that a consistent message is given regarding the use of the protocol.
3. Duty to Respond
  - 3.1 Schools will respond to all high-risk/threat-related behaviours. All high-risk behaviours will be taken seriously and assessed accordingly.
  - 3.2 Each school shall designate a threat assessment team leader, who will be either a school administrator or family school liaison counsellor or school-based counsellor.

#### 4. Immediate Risk Procedures

- 4.1 These are those matters for immediate police intervention.
- 4.2 The Principal or designate shall contact the police immediately and take steps to ensure the safety of all those in the school by activating established procedures such as school evacuation or school security (lockdown).
- 4.3 The Principal will notify the Director of Support Services as soon as possible following initial police contact.

#### 5. High-Risk Behaviours

- 5.1 Upon receiving a report of high-risk behaviour, the Principal or designate will initiate the protocol for the Stage 1 response of the STAT composed of the Principal (or designate), family school liaison counsellor or school-based counsellor and police, in order to assess the high-risk behaviour.
- 5.2 In cases where it is believed a Criminal Code violation has occurred, the police officer assigned to the STAT will determine whether or not charges will be laid.
- 5.3 If the police choose not to lay initial charges, the STAT will continue to conduct a risk assessment and determine follow-up recommendations.
- 5.4 Although there is ongoing collaboration among Threat Assessment Team members, each team member has his/her own "jurisdiction."
- 5.5 The Principal will notify the parent(s) of the student making the threat at the earliest opportunity, as well as the parents of those students against whom the threat was made. Parents become an integral part of the initial risk assessment process.
- 5.6 When information collected as part of the Stage 1 response suggests that a student who has displayed high-risk behaviour poses a significant risk/threat, the CTAT membership would be requested through the office of the Director of Support Services.
- 5.7 In order to protect others and/or the threat maker, students may be suspended from school by the Principal during the assessment period. (A suspension may create the necessary context for the high-risk student who is already struggling with suicidal or homicidal ideation. When a suspension occurs, a key question beyond "when to suspend" is, "where to suspend." The isolation and disconnection felt by high-risk students during a suspension may be exacerbated if steps are not taken to keep the student connected to healthy supports.)

- 5.8 The Violence Risk Threat Assessment Team (Stage 1 and /or Stage 2) will guide the process from initial assessment to planning interventions to decrease risk, to plan for re-entry into school where a suspension has occurred.
  - 5.9 If circumstances warrant, and following the completion of necessary assessments, team members may work with the student and their parent(s) to develop a re-entry plan for school that becomes a signed contract by all participants.
6. Duty to Victims and Others
- 6.1 The family school liaison counsellor/school-based counsellor will ensure that appropriate support is provided to those against whom threats have been made.
  - 6.2 The Principal will notify all school staff and parents, if necessary, within a reasonable time period when the protocol has been activated as a result of high-risk behaviour.
7. Students Requiring Special Consideration
- 7.1 When dealing with students under 12 years of age, students with special needs or other exceptional students, accountability/maturation issues and cognitive abilities shall be taken into consideration.
  - 7.2 Since these students can still pose a risk, the Director of Support Services will be consulted.
  - 7.3 The Principal and the Director of Support Services will determine police involvement. (Some of these students may benefit from police involvement as a way to provide a “teaching moment” for the child.)
8. Worrisome Behaviours
- 8.1 School staff will communicate all worrisome behaviours to the family school liaison counsellor or school-based counsellor for consultation.
  - 8.2 School staff, subsequent to consultation with the family school liaison counsellor, will contact parents when worrisome behaviour is observed.
  - 8.3 The Principal will consult with the family school liaison counsellor and other appropriate staff as to whether or not a threat/risk assessment needs to be conducted. The Director of Support Services may be a member of the team, as necessary.

- 8.4 The police may be consulted, but doing so does not generally constitute a formal complaint.
9. Stage 1 Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) Report Form
- 9.1 The Principal (or designate), or family school liaison/school-based counsellor will be responsible for completing a VTRA Report Form, which will be kept on file. A copy will be forwarded to the Director of Support Services. The format of this report is appended to this Administrative Procedure.
- 9.2 The notification of a completed VTRA Report Form will be placed in the student's Student Record.

**Legal Reference:** Section 12, 45, School Act  
Section 264.1(1), Criminal Code of Canada

**Cross Reference:** Family School Liaison Counselling Handbook

**Forms:** Violence Threat/Risk Assessment Incident Report for Student File  
Violence Threat/Risk Assessment Fair Notice Letter