



Center for Prevention Programs
and Partnerships

Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) in Practice

Overview

Behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) is an evidence-based and systematic process to **identify, inquire, assess, and manage** potential threats. **Multidisciplinary** teams, including prevention providers¹ from education, mental health, social services, law enforcement, faith communities, and other community institutions, can use a behavioral threat assessment and management process to provide alternatives to criminal justice interventions for individuals who may be at risk of moving toward violence. BTAM teams can be implemented in schools, workplaces, and communities.

Implementing an effective BTAM team involves a constant process of:

- **Identifying** concerning behaviors of individuals and changes in those behaviors;
- **Inquiring** by conducting a fact-finding process to inform the assessment;
- **Assessing** individuals' behavior to determine the level of concern; and
- **Implementing** and **managing** intervention strategies for individuals to be directed toward support services for case management before they commit an act of violence.

If an individual exhibits behavioral indicators associated with the pathway to violence, BTAM teams then assess various **risk factors** that may increase the likelihood of violence as well as **protective factors** that may mitigate the risk of violence. Protective factors play an important role in developing an individually tailored management strategy. Factors emerge at the social or environmental, situational, and individual levels.²

Social/Environmental	Situational	Individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Norms and Values • Social Integration and Cohesion • Media and Information Influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Influences • Life Events and Stressors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Wellness and Psychological State • Personality Traits and Behaviors • History of Violence or Aggression • Social Relationships

Why BTAM?

BTAM is a critical prevention initiative that enhances traditional safety and security measures such as physical security, emergency management, and personnel security. In addition to intervening to prevent potential acts of targeted violence, BTAM teams can also strengthen resilience to targeted violence by:

- Helping connect persons of concern to support services through referrals;
- Improving safety climates in schools and at work;¹ and
- Reducing exclusionary discipline in schools and promoting positive educational outcomes.²

¹ A prevention provider is a skilled and knowledgeable professional who (1) directly or indirectly prevents violence by helping people develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to achieve safe, positive, healthy outcomes; and/or (2) institutes protective factors and addresses risk factors for risk reduction within a community; and/or (3) provides services for individuals, as needed, to prevent violence; and/or (4) serves as a violence-prevention policy maker or program manager.

² For more information, see [Enhancing Behavioral Threat Assessment and Case Management Capabilities Through a Public Health-Informed Approach: CP3 Prevention Resource](#).

What are the Best Practices?




- Ensure the team reflects a **multidisciplinary** background, including members from diverse professional backgrounds.
- Build **targeted violence and terrorism prevention tools and training** into already existing BTAM teams.
- Use **validated threat assessment tools** and **evidence-based models**.
- Ensure regular **evaluation** by developing metrics to assess effectiveness of the threat assessment and case management process.
- Train on topics like **duty to warn, duty to protect, HIPAA, and FERPA**, and ensure that threat assessment activities follow legal, ethical, and professional standards.
- **Prioritize BTAM in state strategies** to prevent targeted violence and terrorism and ensure activities are fully integrated into state resources such as mental, behavioral, and other support services.

BTAM in Practice:

A subset of Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) Grant Program projects work directly with individuals exhibiting behavioral indicators associated with the pathway to violence. Across case management project types, TVTP grantee projects opened 1,172 cases from FY 2020 to FY 2023. Across the 1,172 cases, TVTP grantees made 881 referrals to external resources, including 476 referrals to mental/behavioral health counseling, 141 to social services, 59 to housing assistance, 48 to job training/skill development, and 7 to faith-based counseling. Only 77 cases (6.5%) resulted in a referral to law enforcement for a potential criminal investigation.




CP3 recognizes that BTAM teams are called upon to assess referrals for cases requiring a complex set of interventions from multiple services providers, sometimes requiring coordination across diverse community resources.

♥ *Example 1: Case involving a long-term behavioral problem*

 Problem	 Action	 Result
<p>A person with a history of workplace violence and serious mental illness threatened a shooting at a non-acute care site.</p> <p>Given the individual's history and the severity of the threat, the situation required immediate intervention, particularly from a therapeutic standpoint, to prevent further escalation.</p>	<p>The BTAM team worked closely with law enforcement, mental health services, and the state's attorney's office to address the pending charges and leverage them into court-ordered mental health treatment.</p> <p>The therapeutic intervention was the primary focus, with the team facilitating discussions between the person of interest's public defender and the authorities to agree on a treatment-focused resolution.</p> <p>The threat assessment team and community support team had been trained together and shared a common language and philosophy in BTAM, which helped align their approach to addressing the issue.</p>	<p>The case was successfully resolved with a court-ordered mental health treatment plan, avoiding a more punitive legal outcome.</p> <p>The collaboration between the teams enabled a public health-informed approach to prevent targeted violence and effectively addressed the underlying mental health concerns.</p> <p>This proactive, therapeutic intervention likely prevented a future violent incident while ensuring ongoing monitoring and care for the individual.</p>

Some programs have used grant support to provide tools, trainings, and guidance in cases that require complex interventions involving the legal system.

♥ Example 2: Case involving a threat to healthcare workers

 Problem	 Action	 Result
<p>A family member of a seriously ill patient displayed disruptive behaviors and threatened to kill hospital staff.</p> <p>The individual was charged with a felony, and the hospital's BTAM team identified multiple risk factors that posed a continued threat to the healthcare staff.</p> <p>Immediate action was needed to address the safety of staff and patients while managing the situation therapeutically.</p>	<p>The hospital's BTAM team collaborated with a community threat/support team that included mental health professionals, law enforcement, and the state's attorney's office.</p> <p>They focused on therapeutic outcomes with levels of supervision to minimize the risk of violence. The hospital's BTAM team also played a key role in training the community team, creating a common understanding of BTAM processes, and fostering trust.</p> <p>Over the following month, there was seamless, lawful sharing of information among all stakeholders, ensuring both legal and physical safety measures were properly informed.</p>	<p>The case was resolved with a guilty plea to a misdemeanor, avoiding an overly punitive felony conviction.</p> <p>The court ordered supervised mental health treatment, addressing the underlying behavioral health crisis.</p> <p>The outcome provided accountability for the individual while adding supervision and mitigating the risk of future violence.</p> <p>This collaboration helped balance physical safety interventions and psychological safety for the healthcare staff.</p>

CP3 prioritizes privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties consistent with DHS legal authorities and policy. CP3 works to ensure that its programs include fundamental constitutional and legal protections. CP3 does not engage in widespread data collection or enforcement activities like investigations or intelligence gathering. CP3 does not engage in censorship or encourage or facilitate any censorship. Government censorship of viewpoints not only infringes on individuals' constitutional rights, but is also an ineffective tactic to prevent targeted violence and terrorism.

For More Information:

The Department of Homeland Security Center for Prevention Program and Partnerships (CP3) provides resources to prevent and mitigate acts of targeted violence and terrorism.

Regional Prevention Coordinators support targeted violence and terrorism prevention efforts at the state and local levels. They share information, provide training, and help build networks for community partners who can engage in prevention. To learn more, visit [Regional Prevention Coordinators | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#). To connect with a CP3 Regional Prevention Coordinator, email cp3field@hq.dhs.gov.

The **Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program** provides funding for state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, nonprofits, and institutions of higher education to establish or enhance capabilities to prevent targeted violence and terrorism. Learn more and apply at www.dhs.gov/tvtpgrants, or contact the grants team at terrorismprevention@hq.dhs.gov.

The **Prevention Resource Finder** provides public information on federal resources to help prepare for and prevent targeted violence and terrorism across our country. Resources on the website include community support resources, grant funding opportunities, information sharing platforms, evidence-based research, and training opportunities to reduce the risk of targeted violence, including hate-based targeted violence. Find out more at [Prevention Resource Finder | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#).

Additional Resources

Many federal agencies provide resources on behavioral threat assessment and management teams. Below are a few of these toolkits and educational materials that may help to provide examples and guidelines for developing such teams in your communities. While many are geared toward schools, they can be adapted for other organizations.

Resource	Description
CP3's "Enhancing Behavioral Threat Assessment and Case Management Capabilities Through a Public Health-Informed Approach: CP3 Prevention Resource"	Through federal grant funding and technical assistance, the Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3) has supported the development of dozens of behavioral threat assessment and management teams in communities across the United States. Based on this work and engagement with experts, researchers, and practitioners, this Prevention Resource outlines how behavioral threat assessment and case management models may benefit by adopting a public health-informed approach to targeted violence and terrorism prevention. Enhancing Behavioral Threat Assessment and Case Management Capabilities Homeland Security (dhs.gov)
The National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC)	The National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) provides research and guidance on preventing targeted violence, threat assessment, and risk management. Research includes "Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model," an operational guide for preventing targeted school violence; "Improving School Safety Through Bystander Reporting," a toolkit for strengthening K-12 reporting programs; and "Behavioral Threat Assessment Units: A Guide for State and Local Law Enforcement to Prevent Targeted Violence," a guide that offers a scalable framework for state and local law enforcement agencies to proactively identify and intervene with those who display threatening or concerning behaviors in their communities.

Resource	Description
FBI’s “Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing, and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks”	<p>This report, a practical guide on assessing and managing the threat of targeted violence, contains concrete strategies to help communities prevent these types of incidents. The report outlines best practices, case studies, and tools for threat assessment professionals, highlighting the importance of early intervention.</p> <p>Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, Assessing, and Managing the Threat of Targeted Attacks — FBI</p>
The Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team (JCAT)’s “First Responder’s Toolbox: Threat Assessment and Management (TATM)”	<p>This resource, produced by JCAT, is an overview of the threat assessment and threat management model (TATM) and its application to preventing acts of targeted violence constituting terrorism. The resource is designed for public safety professionals and outlines key elements of the TATM model and multidisciplinary teams, as well as several additional resources for training.</p> <p>https://www.dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/jcat/firstresponderstoolbox/147s-Threat_Assessment_Threat_Managment.pdf</p>
The National Threat Evaluation and Reporting Office (NTER)’s Trainings and Resources	<p>NTER provides several educational resources to train community stakeholders in BTAM techniques and best practices. These include the Master Training Program, which prepares partners at federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial (F/SLTT) levels to build out BTAM processes and capabilities. NTER also offers the Foundations of Targeted Violence Prevention eLearning course, which educates the public on recognizing and reporting concerning behaviors.</p>

¹ Nekvasil, E. & Cornell, D.G. (2015). Student Threat Assessment Associated With Safety in Middle Schools. Journal of Threat Assessment and Management. 2. 98-113. 10.1037/tam0000038.

² Research indicates that exclusionary discipline and zero tolerance policies may be associated with negative outcomes for students’ educational development, including underperformance and delinquency. See Kern, L. (2024). School Shootings: Current Status and Recommendations for Research and Practice. Behavioral Disorders, 49(2), 116-127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01987429231214801>