

# Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management

2025 Alvarez Associates, LLC



# Link to Resources Page



# Disclaimer

The concepts taught during this training are based upon published literature and research. Threat assessments and threat management are best conducted by a multi-disciplinary team that includes the advice and counsel of experts in law, public safety, security, law enforcement, mental health, and experts in safety regarding the industry where the investigation is taking place. Nothing presented today should be construed as legal advice.

# Course Objectives

Upon completing this course, you should be able to:

- Understand the Dynamics of Workplace Violence
- Better Understand Threatening and Concerning Behavior
- Explain the Core Concepts of Threat Assessment
- Identify a Range of Threat Assessment Tools and Resources
- Identify Strategies for Intervention and Management



# Getting Started

STEP 1: Establish a Behavioral Threat Assessment Team and Policy

STEP 2: Create Operational Protocols and Procedures

STEP 3: Identify and Process Reports of Concerning Behavior

STEP 4: Gather Information to Assess for Risk

STEP 5: Develop Risk Management Strategies

STEP 6: Promote Continuous Improvement and a Culture of Prevention

Source: USSS

# Workplace Violence

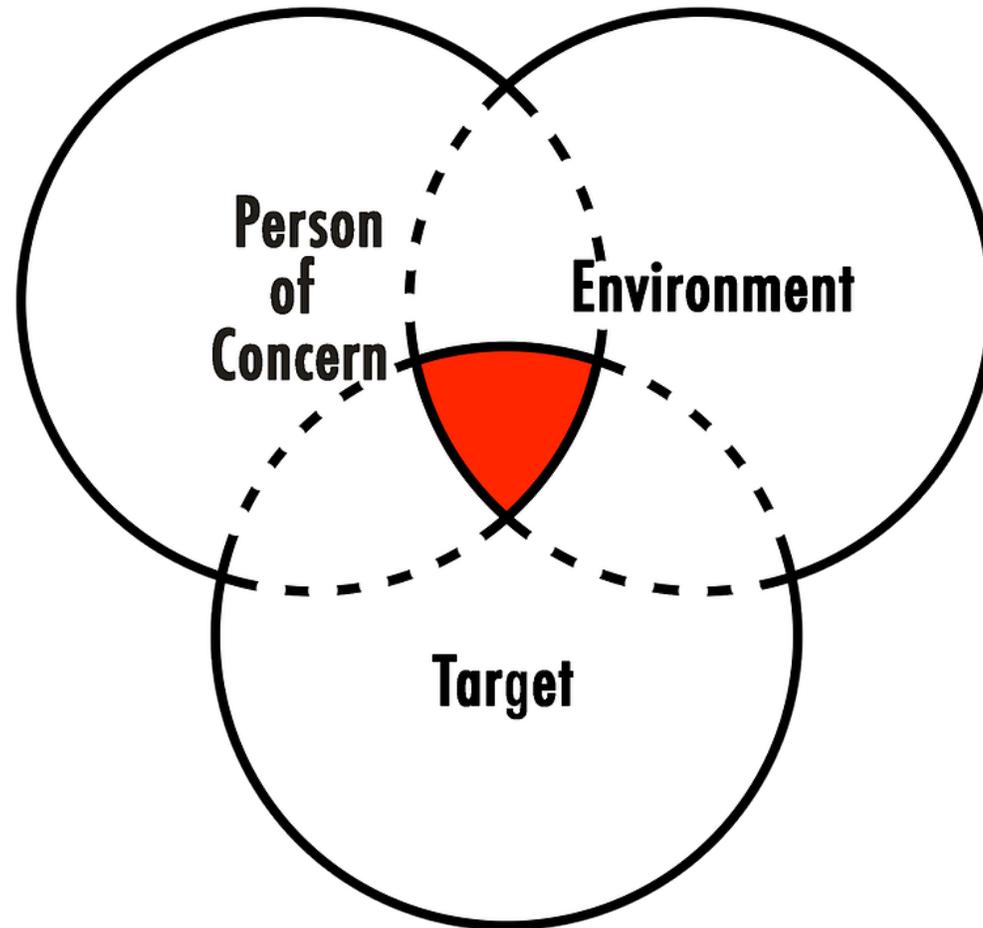


# What is Workplace Violence?

Workplace violence is defined as “any act of violence or threat of violence that occurs in a place of employment.” It includes the threat or use of physical force or any weapon, against an employee that results in, or has a high likelihood of resulting in, injury, psychological trauma, or stress.

*Note: Proposed Cal/OSHA language specifically includes Stalking.*

# Spheres of Influence



# Types of Workplace Violence



## Criminal

Violence committed by anyone who enters a workplace, has no legitimate business, and they approach workers with the intent to commit a crime



## Customer/Client

Violence directed at employees by customers, clients, patients or any others for whom services are provided.



## Coworker

Violence committed against an employee by a current or former employee, supervisor, or manager.



## Personal Relationships

Violent acts committed in the workplace by someone who doesn't work there, but has a personal relationship with an employee

# Warning Signs - Criminal



- Loitering near entrances/exits
- “Customers” entering store right at closing time
- “Customer” who seems to be waiting until people leave
- Paying extra attention to or asking about security
- **Frequent “scanning” of store and employees**
- Employees being followed
- Facility being watched
- Unseasonable or clothing that conceals identity

# Warning Signs - Customer

- **The person doesn't act like a "regular" customer**
- They are not satisfied with any solution you offer
- Obvious signs that the person is under the influence of drugs and or alcohol
- Makes threats or behaves in a threatening manner
- Attempts to isolate you
- Physically posturing (clinched fists, intense stare, stomping around)
- **They seem unreasonably frustrated**



# Warning Signs – Coworkers

- **Unresolved grievances**
- **“Justice Seekers”**
- **Bizarre comments or behavior**
- Displays of temper - aggressive outbursts
- Ominous fascination with weapons
- Intimidating others and/or instilling fear
- Expressing extreme depression and/or anger
- Drug or alcohol abuse problem
- Rigid and inflexible
- An obsessive involvement with a job
- A history of violent behavior



# Warning Signs – Intimate Partners

- Seem afraid or anxious to please their partner.
- Check in often with their partner
- Receive frequent, harassing phone calls.
- Talk about their partner's temper, jealousy, or possessiveness.
- Have frequent injuries, with the excuse of “accidents.”
- Frequently miss work, school, or social occasions
- Dress in clothing designed to hide bruises
- **Non-Fatal Strangulation**
- **Assault During Pregnancy**
- **Stalking Behavior**





We are watching for  
concerning **behavior**, not  
concerning people.

# Case Study – Joseph Ferguson



On September 8 and 10, 2001, 20-year-old Joseph Ferguson committed multiple shootings in Sacramento, killing five people and injuring two others before shooting and killing himself following a shootout with authorities on September 10.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kairwy9Q4AQ>

# Timeline of Incident

**September 7th, 2001** - Ferguson was suspended by Burns Security for vandalizing his coworker/ex-girlfriend's car with an ax.

**September 8, 2001** - Ferguson fatally shot two Burns Security guards at the city corporation yard; his first victim was Susu, his ex-girlfriend.

- About 30 minutes later Ferguson shot and killed two more people at the Miller Park Marina: a third Burns security guard, and a 19-year-old marina worker.
- Around midnight, at the Sacramento Zoo, Ferguson handcuffed an additional security guard to a tree and fled the scene in her car.

# Conclusion

**September 9, 2001**, Ferguson broke into the home of a former Burns Security supervisor and held him and his wife hostage for most of the day. Before leaving to kill his ex-girlfriend's father (also a Burns Security employee). He recorded a video and killed the supervisor.

**Early on September 10**, Ferguson shot and injured an officer after exchanging fire with authorities at Folsom Boulevard and Zinfandel Drive, using a converted fully-automatic AK-47. During the exchange, a stray bullet struck a 27-year-old bystander in the abdomen, injuring him. Ferguson, who was unscathed from the exchange, shot and killed himself shortly after the shootout.

# Team Discussion

- Threat Assessment Challenges
- Threat Management Challenges

# Mental Health Awareness



What questions or concerns do you  
have about Mental Health?

What have you heard about heard  
about Mental Health?

# Continuum of Mental Health

## MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM



# Common Types of Mental Disorders?

**Anxiety Disorders:** Includes generalized anxiety, panic disorder, social anxiety, and specific phobias. Characterized by excessive worry or fear.

**Mood Disorders:** Major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder. Involves persistent sadness or extreme mood swings.

**Schizophrenia and Psychotic Disorders:** Involves distorted thinking, hallucinations, or delusions.

**Personality Disorders:** Borderline, narcissistic, obsessive-compulsive personality disorder. Patterns of behavior causing distress or dysfunction

# What is a Mental Health Crisis?

The person cannot resolve the situation with the skills and resources available. The person's behaviors put them at risk of harming themselves or others (don't wait until this happens).

It's a traumatic event

Usually unpredictable

Often emotionally overwhelming

Alters work environment

# Recognizing Mental Health Crisis

## **Inability to cope with daily tasks**

Hygiene, eating, sleep problems.

## **Rapid mood swings**

Increased energy, pacing, suddenly depressed or happy/calm after a period of depression.

## **Increased agitation**

Verbal threats, violence, out-of-control behavior, destroys property, inappropriate language.

## **Abusive behavior**

Hurts others, self-injury, drug/alcohol abuse.

## **Loss of touch with reality (psychosis)**

Doesn't recognize family/friends, has increasingly strange ideas, confused, hears voices.

**Isolation from work, family, friends** Less interested in usual activities.

**Unexplained physical symptoms** Facial expressions look different, headaches, stomach aches, complains of not feeling well.

988

SUICIDE  
& CRISIS  
**LIFELINE**



You are not trying to diagnose a  
mental disorder.  
Observe and deal with behaviors.

**SCENARIO**



# Scenario – Former Employee

Lisa, a former marketing manager, was terminated about three months ago due to repeated policy violations, including unauthorized use of company resources. During her exit interview, she expressed anger toward her supervisor, Mark, claiming he unfairly targeted her for dismissal.

Since her termination, Lisa has posted negative reviews about the organization on public platforms, including Glassdoor and X, alleging a “toxic culture” and naming Mark specifically.

# Scenario – Former Employee

Two weeks ago, a current employee reported seeing Lisa lingering near the company's parking lot after hours, though she left when approached.

Recently, Mark received an anonymous text message from an unknown number stating, "You'll regret what you did." The company's security team confirmed that Lisa's access badge was deactivated upon her termination, but they have not yet traced the text message.

# Scenario – Former Employee

Today, the reception desk received a package addressed to Mark with no return address. The package contained a printed note saying, “You can’t hide from your mistakes,” along with a broken USB drive.

Security personnel reviewed CCTV footage and confirmed Lisa was seen near the office building the previous evening, though she did not enter.

This morning, an employee reported that Lisa attempted to contact them via social media, asking detailed questions about Mark’s current projects and schedule. The employee did not respond but alerted HR.

# Questions for the Team

1. How credible is the threat posed by Lisa based on her actions and communications?
2. What steps can be taken to protect Mark while maintaining normal business operations?

# Behavioral Threat Assessment



# What is Threat Assessment?

Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management is a team-based **PROCESS** that has been referred to as the “missing link.” It is the process of trying to connect the dots that paints the picture that someone is moving on a pathway towards serious and **TARGETED VIOLENCE** before the violent act occurs.

# What is Targeted Violence?

**Targeted violence** refers to **violence** that is goal-directed, predatory, and focused towards a specific individual(s) (e.g., stalking, terrorism, sexual assault).

Source: Dr. Mario Scalora, University of Nebraska Targeted Violence Research Team

# Assessment Principles

1. Targeted violence is the end result of an understandable, and often times discernible, process of thinking and behavior.
2. Targeted violence stems from an interaction between the target, the person of concern and the environment.
3. An investigative, skeptical, inquisitive mindset is critical to successful threat assessment.
4. Effective threat assessment is based upon facts rather than characteristics or traits.
5. Threat assessment is guided by an integrated **process-based** approach.
6. The central question in a threat assessment inquiry is whether a person **poses** a threat, not whether a person **made** a threat.

Source: US Secret Service

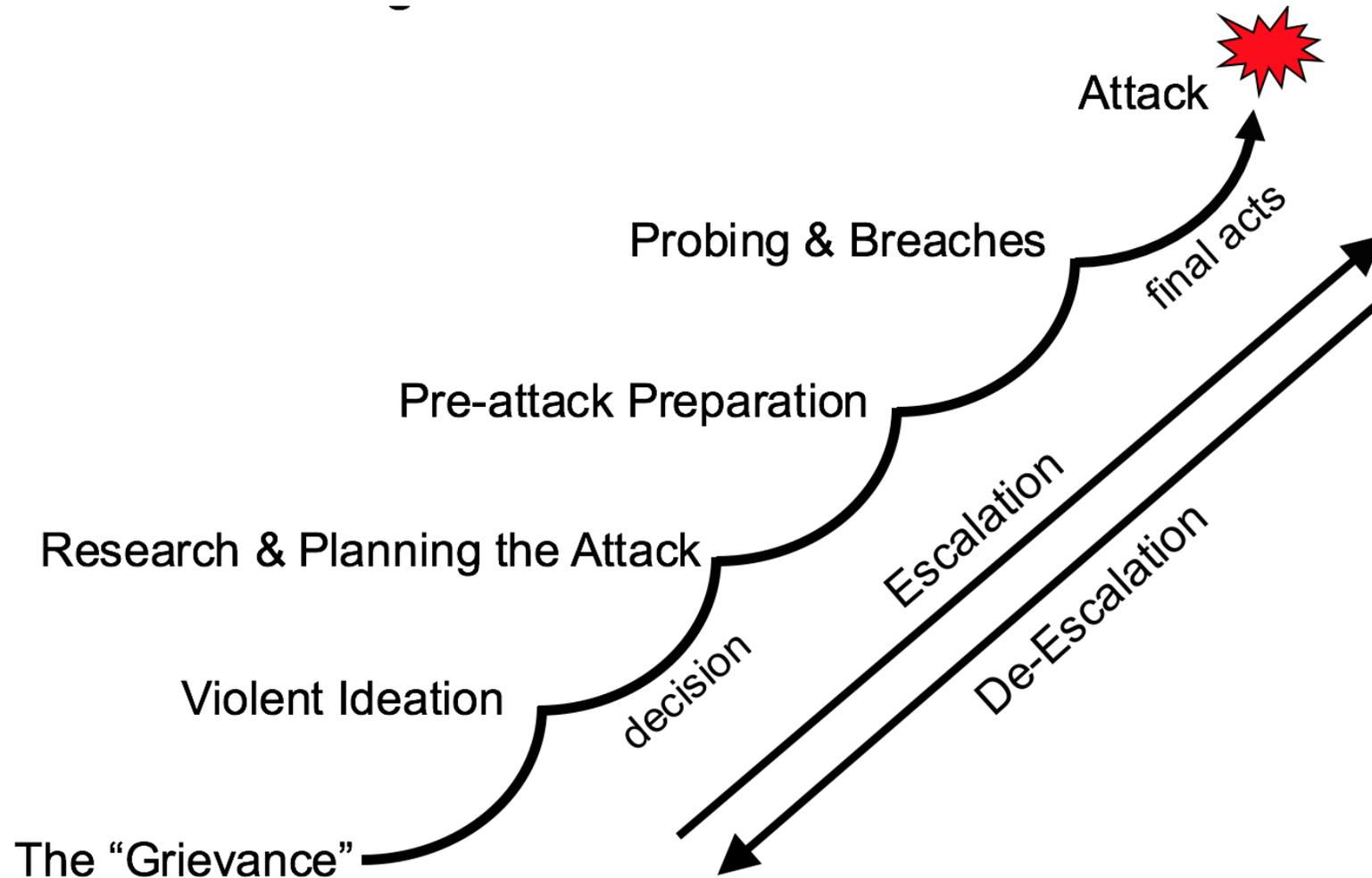


Does the individual pose a threat vs. did they make a threat

Pathway  
towards  
Violence



# The Pathway to Violence



Adapted with permission from F.S. Calhoun and S.W. Weston (2003). *Contemporary threat management: A practical guide for identifying, assessing and managing individuals of violent intent.*

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# Grievance

- Cause of distress or reason for complaint(s)
- Highly personal
- Self reinforcing
- Fuels the feeling of being wronged
- Does not have to be a major issue

# Violence Ideation

- Capacity for or the act of forming or entertaining ideas
- The Person of Concern is starting to or does see violence as a solution.

# Research and Planning

- Seeking information to facilitate an attack
- Surveillance
- Internet research
- Testing security
- Researching methods of attack

# Pre-Attack Preparation

- Acquiring skills
- Acquiring weapons
- Assembling equipment and resources
- Arranging transportation
- Observing significant dates
- Costuming
- Rehearsing, conducting final act behaviors
- “Novel aggression”

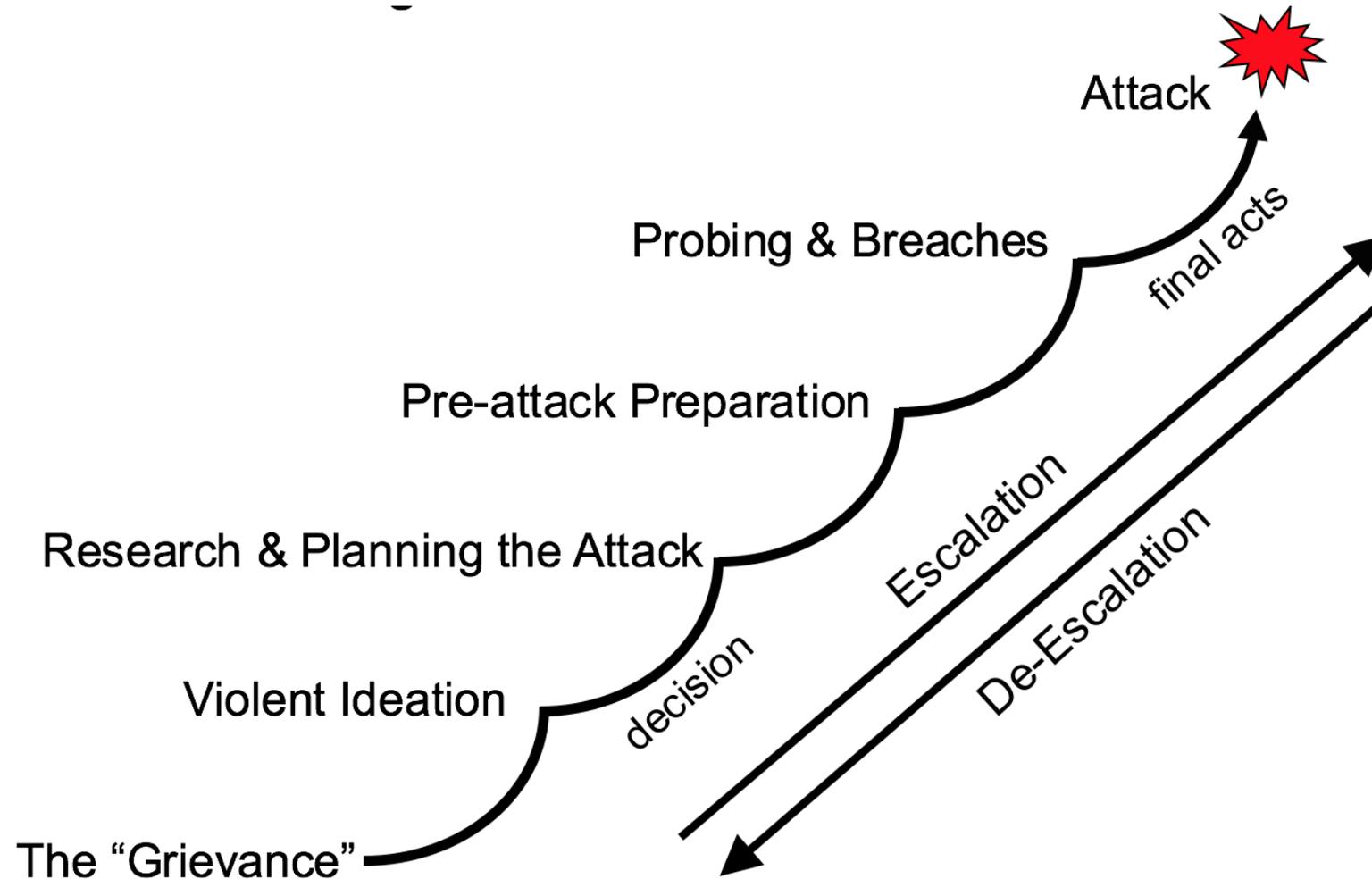
# Probing and Breaches

- Security measures circumvented
- May be an extension of the rehearsal
- May the be start of the attack

# Attack

Carrying out (or attempting to carry out) the intended violence against the target

# The Pathway to Violence



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Attackers don't snap,  
they decide

# Conducting the Assessment



# Step by Step

Identify  
Assess  
Manage  
Follow-up

# Step 1 - Identifying

## Notification of an Incident by Victim or Other Party

1. Investigative Questionnaire
2. Review available company records
3. Review public records (civil and criminal) for the parties involved
4. Open-source social media search
5. Law enforcement records and contacts
6. Follow-up or additional interviews
  - Victim(s)
  - Witness(es)
  - Other knowledgeable parties
7. Interview of the Person(s) of Concern

# Step 1 - Identifying

Prior to conducting any interviews, the team should ask the following questions:

**“How much time do we have?”**

**“Who will be interviewed?”**

**“In what order will we interview them?”**

**“Who will interview whom?”**

Depending on the severity of the case, one team member may serve as the primary interviewer to ensure continuity of data collection and interviewing technique, i.e. criminal charges – security/police member; mental/physical health issues - clinical member.

# Step 2 – Assessing Threatening Behavior

**WHO** - Concerns should be evaluated by a multi-disciplinary team. No one person should make the final decision.

**WHAT** - Does the individual pose a threat, not merely was a threat made?

**HOW** – Use a structured process

- Inquisitive and Skeptical Mindset
- Stay in your “swim lane”
- The pathway from idea to action is not a straight line
- You may not have much time to respond.



# Step 2 – Threat Enhancers

## **Risk Factors**

- History of Violence
- Child Exposure
- Substance Abuse
- Severe Mental Illness
- History of Suicidality
- Fascination with Weapons
- Negative Family Dynamics
- Isolation

## **Warning Behaviors**

- Pathway Behaviors
- Fixation
- Identification
- Novel Aggression
- Energy Burst
- Leakage
- Direct Threat
- Approach
- Last Resort Behavior

## **Triggers and Stressors**

- Things in the POC Life that could cause tension
- Significant Milestones

# STEP 2 – Mitigating Factors

- Pursuing legal and socially sanctioned methods of resolution
- Positive realistic goals
- Supportive Family
- Social Support (friends and groups)
- Coping Mechanisms
- Access to support

## Step 2 – Level of Concern

Low	The situation does not appear to pose a threat of violence or serious harm to self/others, and any exhibited issues can be resolved with little to no direct intervention.
Moderate	The situation does not appear to pose an immediate threat of violence or serious harm to self/others at the time of the assessment, but there are behaviors that indicate a continuing intent or potential for future violence or harm to self or others. The situation requires case management and continuing updates.
High	The situation appears to pose a threat of violence, exhibiting behaviors that indicate both a continuing intent to harm self/others and efforts to acquire the capacity to carry out the plan, and may also exhibit other concerning behavior that requires intervention.
Severe	The situation appears to pose a clear and immediate threat of serious violence toward others that requires containment and immediate action to protect identified or identifiable target(s) and may also exhibit other concerning behavior that requires intervention.

FBI, Making Prevention a Reality

# Step 2 – Assessment – Tools and Resources

When appropriate, utilize objective tools appropriate to context consistent with: purpose intended, training, empirical support, professional community consensus and experience.

## Professional Opinions

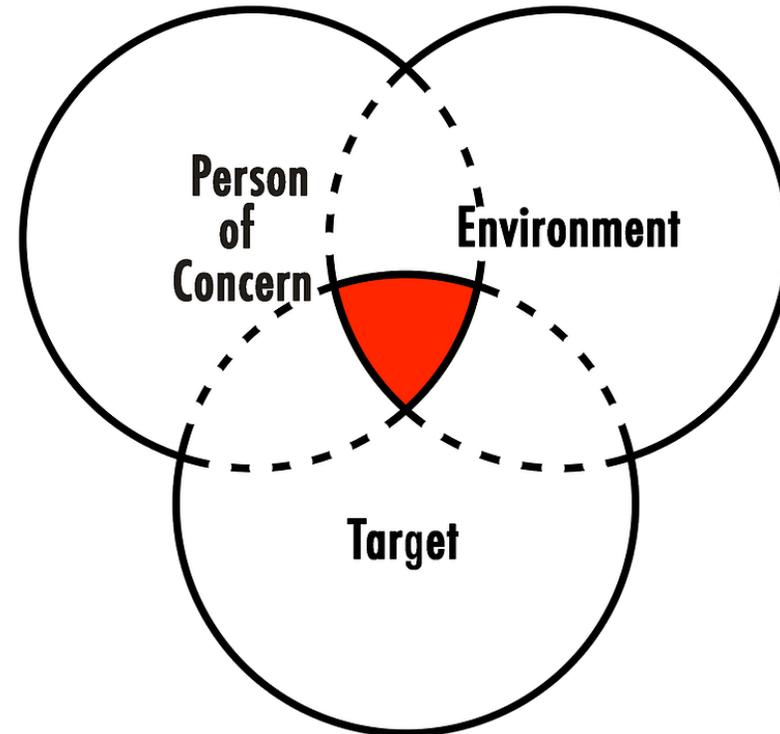
- Structured data collection process
- Largely dependent on experience and Training

Assessment tools using structured professional judgement:

- HCR-20, SARA, PCL-R, VRAG,
- SAVRY
- WAVR-21

# Step 3 – Managing Threatening Behavior

- Changes to the environment
- Intervention with the POC
- Intervention with the target



# Step 3 – Managing Threatening Behavior

## Environment

- Armed Security
- Lock down facility
- BOLO
- LE Presence

## Target

- How do they perceive situation?
- Suggest changes in behavior
- Remove from situation

## Person of Concern

- Interview
- Behavioral Contracts
- Provide Alternatives
- TRO
- Arrest

# Step 3 – Managing Threatening Behavior

- Primary goal is to prevent violence
- Most targets/victims don't have resources to protect against a determined attacker
- Target/Victims have the right to choose a different solution
- No one is ever 100% safe

# Step 4 – Follow Up

Workplace violence can occur days, weeks and even months after an employer thinks a threatening situation was resolved. Management may need to orchestrate a method to monitor and/or intervene with regard to a threatening individual over time. That can mean making difficult decisions about how best to monitor and who (inside or outside the organization) should intervene.



**“At this point in time”** One additional bit of information can dramatical increase or decrease the level of concern.





**Alvarez Associates**

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION

**Hector R Alvarez, MSPsy, CTM**

**halvarez@wvpexperts.com**

**916-293-8852**

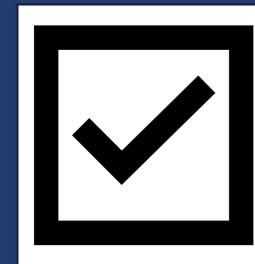


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WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION



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