

**January 22nd, 2013**

# **Halton Community Violence Threat Risk Assessment (V.T.R.A.) Protocol**

## **In Partnership with**

Halton District School Board  
Halton Catholic District School Board  
Provincial Schools, Milton, Ontario  
Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre Sud  
Conseil scolaire Viamonde  
Halton Regional Police Service  
Halton Healthcare Services  
Joseph Brant Hospital  
Halton Children's Aid Society  
Regional Municipality of Halton Health Department  
Reach Out Centre for Kids  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Peel-Halton  
John Howard Society of Peel-Halton-Dufferin  
MCYS Youth Justice Probation  
ADAPT Halton  
Woodview Mental Health and Autism Services

The information collected, with the use of the attached forms, is being collected, used, retained and disclosed in accordance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* for the purposes of providing education and related services.

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## **Purpose of the Halton Community Violence Threat Risk Assessment Protocol (V.T.R.A.)**

The Halton Regional Police Service (H.R.P.S.) and all of our School and community partners are committed to making our schools safe for students, staff and visitors. As a result, all Protocol partners will respond to all student behaviours that pose a potential risk to any students, staff or members of the community. It is hoped that support for early intervention measures by the School Boards and community partners will prevent violence in our schools and in the community.

The effective continuing implementation of this Protocol will support collaborative planning to prevent traumatic events. In addition, the timely sharing of information about students at risk of violence towards themselves and/or others will ensure that risk management and safety and support plans are put into place.

The strength of the partnerships of the Police, School Boards and community agencies lies in the cross sector composition of the multi-disciplinary Community Threat Risk Assessment Partner (C.T.A.P.) Team. Without delay, the Team will share and review student information and the details of an “event” in order to collaborate using a broad range of expertise. This collaborative process will respect the individual’s rights to privacy and the safety of all.

The effectiveness of this Protocol lies in the necessity that individuals are trained in the V.T.R.A. course 4<sup>th</sup> Edition and subsequent editions.

## **Statement of Principle**

All partners are accountable to the Protocols’ purpose and have a shared responsibility to actively take steps to prevent traumatic events in schools. The partners agree to work together for the common goal of threat reduction and improved safety in schools and the community by sharing information, advice and support in a proactive way that assists in the prevention of a potential traumatic event.

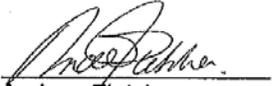
All partners are committed to work together for the benefit of children and youth by:

- Building working relationships based upon mutual trust and respect.
- Involving children, youth and their families in planning for services and supports.
- Recognizing that each student has unique strengths and needs that must be considered when developing an Intervention Plan and a Plan of Action.
- Participate in ongoing training, staff development and program review.

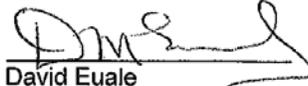
It is understood and accepted by all community partners committed to this Protocol, that in order to respond effectively to any threat, all parties will operate in a transparent and open manner to ensure that information is shared in a timely manner so that a tragedy can be averted.

## SIGNATORIES

We, the undersigned, support the Halton V.T.R.A. Protocol and the principles as set out in this document.



Andrew Fletcher  
Deputy Chief of Operations,  
Halton Regional Police Service



David Euale  
Director of Education,  
Halton District School Board



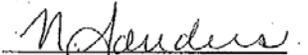
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Halton Catholic District School Board



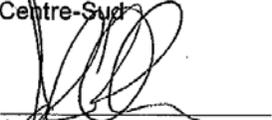
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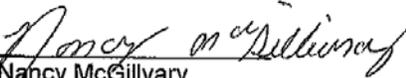
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Halton Healthcare Services



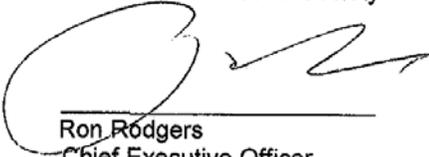
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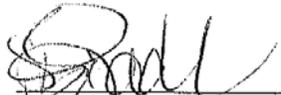
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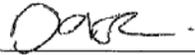


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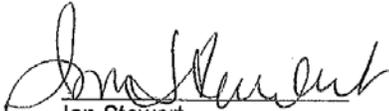
**SIGNATORIES**



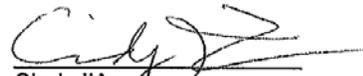
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## **Protocol Development Team Members**

### **HALTON REGIONAL POLICE SERVICE**

Jackie Gordon, Inspector, Chair  
Susan Hatanaka, Police Officer  
John Langill, Educational Liaison Consultant

### **HALTON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**

Margaret Cericola, Systems Principal  
Mary Jane Farrish, Vice Principal  
Janice Hambrock, Systems Principal

### **HALTON CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**

Toni Pinelli, Superintendent of Education  
Anthony Cordeiro, Vice Principal  
Dwight Jonker, Vice Principal

### **CONSEIL SCOLAIRE VIAMONDE**

*Anik Gagnon – Adjointe à la surintendance de l'éducation*

### **CONSEIL SCOLAIRE DE DISTRICT CATHOLIQUE CENTRE-SUD**

Angèle Amodeo, Directrice-adjointe des Services à l'élève, Volet Écoles sécuritaires

*Joanne Van Alstyne-consultant*

### **PROVINCIAL SCHOOLS BRANCH (MILTON)**

Jeanne Leonard, Principal, Ernest C. Drury School

*Thank you to our Community Partners for their contributions towards the development of the V.T.R.A. Protocol and their commitment to help to keep our children safe.*

This Protocol is dedicated to the memory of Janice Hambrock, Systems Principal for the Halton District School Board and a member of the V.T.R.A. Committee

## **Keeping Records and Statistics**

School Boards will collect statistics on the number of Stage One and Two V.T.R.A.s in a calendar year and will provide these statistics to the Halton Regional Police Service. These statistics will be utilized to determine an overall evaluation of V.T.R.A. and will not release specific school information. These statistics may also identify further training needs.

Each community partner is responsible for documenting and storing information as required by their own policy or legislation.

## **Acknowledgements**

This Protocol has been adapted from the works of Kevin Cameron, Director of the Canadian Centre for Violence Threat Risk Assessment and Trauma Response. Specifically, the following document has served as the founding guide for developing this Protocol:

*Canadian Centre for Violence Threat Risk Assessment and Trauma Response and Violence Threat Risk Assessment Level One Training Guide Fourth Edition, 2011.*

*Community Protocol for Violence Threat Risk Assessment (V.T.R.A.) and Intervention, Ninth Edition, January, 2011.*

*Halton District School Board – V.T.R.A. Forms*

*A Community Threat Assessment Protocol, A Collaborative Response to Student Threat Making Behaviours, February 2011. Limestone District School Board & Partners.*

*In addition, we are grateful for the financial support provided by The Ministry of Community Safety and Corrections for developing the necessary training that has enabled this protocol to be implemented.*

## **Additional Resources**

Please consult the *Halton Police/School Board Protocol 2011* for additional definitions, related requirements and expectations for participating School Boards and External Agencies when collaborating with Halton Regional Police Service and other community partners.

## **Key Factors in Working Together**

All partners are committed to following the Halton Community V.T.R.A. Protocol and Operating Guide that includes the following:

### **Sharing of Relevant Information**

All partners will share relevant information to avert or minimize *imminent* risk of violence that affects the health and safety of any person. In order for the situation to be considered imminent, an immediate response must occur as soon as practicable. If the situation can wait, a Consent Waiver will be required. It is understood that each partner will determine what information and its relevance, subject to their policy and legislative requirements.

### **Investigative Mind Set**

An investigative mind set is central to successful application of the Violence Threat Risk Assessment process. V.T.R.A. requires thoughtful probing, viewing of information with objectivity, and paying attention to key points in the behaviours of the threat-maker (author of the threat).

### **Maintaining Contact Lists**

The School Boards' Superintendent responsible for Safe Schools, or their designate, will maintain a current contact list of the key V.T.R.A. Protocol Partners and will distribute this list electronically to all community partners each time the list is updated. Community Threat Assessment Partner (C.T.A.P.) Team *lead* must communicate any changes with contact information to the Superintendent of Safe Schools, for each School Board as they occur. An email group will be developed for that purpose. The Superintendent responsible for Safe Schools will assign a designate during his/her absence and will notify the community partners of this contact information.

### **Community Activated Cases**

The V.T.R.A. Protocol can also *be activated* by the community partners when a student is demonstrating worrisome behavior and there is a belief that there is immediate risk to members of a school or the community. In this case, open and timely communication between the school, community and police (e.g., Liaison Officers, general patrol etc.) is essential as many non-school hour situations that occur may continue into the next school day. In most instances, the community partner that is considering activating V.T.R.A. will contact the police due to the urgency of the situation. The police will in turn contact the school at the first available opportunity to facilitate the process.

### **Protocol Limitations**

This Protocol document is not a substitute for training in the field of violence threat/risk assessment and should *not* be used until adequate training has been received. The V.T.R.A. Protocol is intended to be used by multi-disciplinary teams trained in the theory and practice of student threat/risk assessment through "Level 1 Violence Threat Risk Assessment Training" program offered by the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response. In order to maintain the integrity of the Protocol, it shall be followed as written.

## **Training**

In order to maintain a minimum level of understanding, there must be a *commitment by all* participants in the V.T.R.A process to train new staff and to ensure existing members have ongoing refresher training. The financial cost of maintaining training will be the responsibility of each agency and school board however steps have been taken to make it as affordable as possible. V.T.R.A - Level One trainers have been developed by both by the Halton District, Halton Catholic School Boards, and the Provincial Schools Branch in conjunction with Police to ensure training sustainability at minimal cost.

## **Program Review**

The V.T.R.A. Protocol will be reviewed by the V.T.R.A. Protocol Development Committee which will meet a minimum of two times per school calendar year in the first two years of the Protocol. This team will consist of designates from both the School and Community Threat Assessment Teams. The implementation of the Protocol and any issues involving from implementation will be discussed.

## **What is a V.T.R.A.?**

V.T.R.A. is a team approach to identifying, evaluating and addressing potential threats from students toward other students, staff, and parents within the school and community environment. The purpose of carrying out a V.T.R.A. is to ensure that those who have knowledge of the student carry out a careful analysis of the potential severity of the threat and determine an appropriate response to the threat-maker.

Kevin Cameron, in "Assessing Violence Potential: Protocol for Dealing with High-Risk Student Behaviours (Jan. 2011)" indicates that:

*The primary purpose of the multidisciplinary V.T.R.A. protocol is to identify indicators that suggest a student may be moving on a pathway towards violence against him/herself or others and intervene to decrease that risk, prevent injury and support the student in receiving the help necessary to address the issues contributing to high-risk behaviour. (P. 3)*

## **Determining the Need for V.T.R.A.**

It is important to use reasonable judgment and consultation when determining whether or not to move forward with a V.T.R.A. Sometimes, worrisome behaviour might be highly unusual given the student's previous history, but not necessarily attack-related or of homicidal intent. It is necessary to take into account various factors, such as:

- Baseline behaviour
- Vacillation or fluidity in the behavior
- Age
- Developmental level
- Special Education profile (mitigating factors)
- Environmental triggers/antecedents will help the team to determine the severity and the most appropriate response
- Anonymous threats duty and intervention
- "Frequency, intensity and recency" of the behaviours

## **Suicide**

Consideration must be made to examine suicidal thoughts or ideation, through the lens of the V.T.R.A. Protocol as it relates to fluidity between homicidal and suicidal domains. This should occur in consultation with a trained V.T.R.A. member. The US Secret Service Report, Safe School Initiative: An Interim Report on the Prevention of Targeted Violence in Schools (2000) reported that as a result of interviewing 41 shooters nearly three quarters of them had threatened, or tried to kill themselves.

### **Three Primary Hypotheses in V.T.R.A.**

- **One:** Is it a conscious or unconscious “Cry for Help”?
- **Two:** Conspiracy of two or more! Who else knows about it? Who else is involved?
- **Three:** Is there any evidence of fluidity?

### **Summary of the Three Stages of V.T.R.A.**

#### ***Stage One:***

##### **Data Collection and Immediate Risk Reducing Intervention Stage School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.)**

Stage One is performed at a minimum by the School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.), which must be comprised of the school Principal/designate, a school based clinician such as a Social Worker or C.Y.C., and the police, when available. The initial data collection is often accomplished in a few hours. Using the data, the Level of Risk is ascertained by the School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.) and communicated to appropriate staff. If there is a low to medium level of concern, this student can likely be managed at school with appropriate (increased) supervision.

- **Low to Medium Level of Concern**  
Implement the Intervention Plan of Action (Most students can be managed with interventions).
- **Medium to High Level of Concern**  
The School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.) has determined that a Stage Two V.T.R.A. is needed.

## **Stage Two:**

### **Multi-Disciplinary Risk Evaluation Stage School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.) and Community Threat Assessment Partners (C.T.A.P.) Team.**

Stage Two involves some or all of the following personnel: police, psychologists, mental health professionals, C.A.S., and school staff including a Principal/designate.

This stage is focused on further data collection beyond the information collected in Stage One. This stage represents a formal part of the V.T.R.A. process as the Team is responsible for evaluating all of the information and data that has been acquired, and creating a revised Intervention Plan of Action.

## **Stage Three:**

### **Multi-Disciplinary Intervention**

Stage Three sees further development of the evaluation into an Intervention Plan of Action. It is viewed as an ongoing plan of intervention and support. The Plan must be reviewed and revised regularly by the School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.).

**Note:** Timelines associated with the completion of each stage will vary depending on the nature and circumstances surrounding the level of risk and threat.

## **Activation of the Stage One and Stage Two Teams**

To facilitate timely activation of a Stage One or Stage Two V.T.R.A., each community partner will identify its lead individual(s) and provide the contact information to the partners identified in the V.T.R.A. Protocol. Consideration must be given to an alternate should the primary contact be unavailable.

<p>An electronic distribution list will be created and distributed to all partners upon completion of the V.T.R.A. Protocol and it is the responsibility of Superintendent in charge of Safe Schools and each community partner to ensure their contact list is current and that all Protocol partners are informed when changes occur.</p>
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**The Activation of a Stage One V.T.R.A.** is initiated by the Principal/designate or a member of the School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.), in consultation with the Principal/designate and the Superintendent with the responsibility for Safe Schools. Where the position of a senior manager in charge of professional psychological services exists, he/she shall be informed. The Principal will then inform the appropriate Superintendent (Family of Schools where applicable). Where the Superintendent of Safe Schools is unavailable, the consultation occurs between the Principal and the appropriate Superintendent for the purposes of support. This Superintendent then becomes the designate for the Safe Schools Superintendent. The person taking the lead role in activating this stage is responsible for contacting and assembling the School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.) including the Police.

**Upon Activation of a Stage Two V.T.R.A.** the Principal/designate (as determined by each School Board) will contact the Superintendent responsible for Safe Schools. If the Superintendent of Safe Schools is unavailable, the Principal or designate will contact the appropriate Superintendent (Family of Schools if applicable). The Superintendent will then become the designate for the Safe Schools Superintendent and will help justify the process if required. Where the position of a Senior Manager in charge of Professional Psychological Services exists, he/she shall be informed.

The Superintendent, in consultation with the School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.), will contact the appropriate Community Threat Assessment Partners (C.T.A.P.) **as soon as possible to request their participation.** It is important to remember that in order to meet the threshold for sharing information without informed consent, some immediate steps needs to occur in order to share the information.

**Activation of a Stage Two V.T.R.A.**

Wherever possible, all meetings and assessments will take place on School Board premises since in most cases, the behaviour that activated the need for community participation will have been *observed in, or will potentially affect the safety of the school or community.*

**Activation of V.T.R.A. by Community Partners:**

When a member of a community partner receives information regarding serious violence, weapons possession or a threat that is “clear, direct and plausible” during non – school hours, call Police immediately – 911.

**Contacting Police**

*In the case of violence or criminal threats, the police officer has full discretion as to whether or not charges will be laid.*

The Youth Office has knowledge and expertise in the area of youth and the V.T.R.A. process, and they are available as a resource and for consultation.

**Stage One:**

The Halton Regional Police Service (H.R.P.S.) will endeavor to support Stage One V.T.R.A.s. In the event that an Officer is not available to attend, then relevant information will be provided to the School Board V.T.R.A. member requesting H.R.P.S. participation as per information sharing agreements.

High School: Contact the High School Officer who is assigned to that school via e-mail/blackberry and indicate “V.T.R.A.” in the subject line.

Elementary School: Contact the Elementary School Liaison Officer assigned to that school via e-mail/blackberry and indicate “V.T.R.A.” in the subject line.

If contact is made, but the assigned Officer is not available to attend, then he/she will attempt to secure an alternate trained H.R.P.S. member to participate. If contact cannot be made with assigned Officer within a reasonable time, then:

## **Contacting Police cont.**

Call the District Staff Sergeant or Detective Sergeant for assistance:

Burlington	905-825-4747 ext. 2310 or 2315
Halton Hills	905-878-5511 ext. 2410 or 2415
Milton	905-878-5511 ext. 2410 or 2415
Oakville	905-825-4747 ext. 2210 or 2215

If further information is received regarding Criminal Code offences, parties involved should be informed of the potential for charges. Police officers involved in a criminal investigation related to the situation shall not be involved directly in the V.T.R.A. The Youth Office will be canvassed for support.

### **Stage Two:**

The H.R.P.S. participant of the Stage One V.T.R.A. will make personal contact to notify the respective H.R.P.S. Youth Office of date/time/location of Stage Two V.T.R.A. and will provide all related information required.

When an H.R.P.S. member did not attend the Stage One, then the V.T.R.A. meeting coordinator will contact the District Youth Office directly to advise the date/time/location of the Stage Two V.T.R.A. and provide all related information required.

Burlington	905-825-4747 ext. 2306/2308
Milton/Acton/Georgetown	905-878-5511 ext. 2406/2421
Oakville	905-825-4747 ext. 2208/2224

## **Related Ministry of Education Legislation**

In determining a response, consideration should be given to requirements outlined in Ministry of Education legislation as follows:

- “Keeping Our Kids Safe at School”- Education Act.
- Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student. – Education Act.
- The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct.
- Policy/Program Memorandum No. 144 – Bullying Prevention and Intervention.
- Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 – Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools.
- Policy/Program Memorandum No. 120 – Mandatory Reporting of Violent Incidents.
- Accepting Schools Act - Education Act, 2012.
- “Violence and Harassment in the Workplace” – Ontario Labour Relations Act, 2011.

## **The Importance of Reporting Information**

*It is the responsibility of each community partner to share relevant information when a student has indicators that suggests he/she is on pathway towards violence against him/herself or others, in order to intervene to decrease risk.*

It is also vitally important that each school teach their staff and students the importance of providing information about any high-risk student behaviours or when they have reasonable grounds to believe there is potential for high risk or violent behaviour.

Additionally, students should be taught that sharing information on worrisome behaviour is not “ratting or snitching” but is everyone’s social responsibility to provide support and to prevent a tragedy. When the information is received by a staff member it should be *promptly reported* to the principal/designate. It is also important for students to understand that no action will be taken against anyone who makes a report unless it is made maliciously. In such cases, the student will be dealt with in accordance with school policy and the law, where applicable.



Halton V.T.R.A. Protocol Committee

**Immediate Threat- Call 911- Implement appropriate emergency response.**

Note: V.T.R.A. does not address active shooter situations. Implement the Lockdown Procedure immediately!

**Types of Behaviours that Determine Levels of Threat Summary**

**Any community partner member who becomes aware of worrisome behaviours, serious risk behaviours and/or threat to safety behaviours will immediately report those behaviours to the appropriate personnel within their respective organization pursuant to its existing internal procedures.**

<p><b>Worrisome* Behaviours</b></p> <p>Includes but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawing pictures, graffiti, writing stories, journal entries with violent and/or self-harm content;</li> <li>• Vague threatening (verbal or electronic) statements made;</li> <li>• Unusual interest in fire;</li> <li>• Unusual interest in inappropriate sexualized behaviour;</li> <li>• Unusual interest in gang activities, violence and/or weapons;</li> <li>• Cruelty towards animals.</li> </ul>	<p><b>High Risk* Behaviours</b></p> <p>Includes but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possession of replica weapons;</li> <li>• Verbal/written threat to injure/kill self or others;</li> <li>• Assault;</li> <li>• Electronic threats to injure/kill self or others;</li> <li>• Suicidal/homicidal ideation;</li> <li>• Inappropriate sexualized behaviour.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Immediate Threat* to Safety Call 911</b></p> <p>Includes but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possession of a weapon;</li> <li>• Assault Causing Bodily Harm;</li> <li>• Suicidal/homicidal acts;</li> <li>• Fire Setting;</li> <li>• Bomb threat;</li> <li>• Unlawful and inappropriate sexualized behaviour.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Suggested Responses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform Principal, investigation, consultation with professional support staff, potential activation of Stage One V.T.R.A.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Suggested Responses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform Principal who investigates, move to Stage One V.T.R.A. (See steps for Stage One in the Operating Guide).</li> <li>• Inform the appropriate Superintendent.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Imperative Response: CALL 911</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the appropriate emergency response.</li> <li>• Safety of all students and staff is the priority, inform the appropriate Superintendent.</li> </ul>

**When to Share Information**

*“Imminent danger trumps privacy!”*

If an individual is in possession of reliable information that may indicate that there is an **imminent or grave danger** to the health and safety of any person or persons, personal information **can be shared without consent**. If personal information has been shared without consent, the individual to whom the information relates shall be advised as soon as reasonably practicable with the reasons for the disclosure and to whom the information was shared, as required by law.

## When to Share Information cont.

The V.T.R.A. Team will determine who is the best person (agency) to notify student/parent and to ensure that the information has been shared.

*Consent to disclose personal information should be obtained wherever possible and reasonable.*

Valid consent does not exist unless the individual knows what he/she is consenting to, and understands the consequences of the intended disclosure. The individual must be made aware that he/she can withdraw consent at any time by giving written or verbal notice.

Green Light	Yellow Light	Red Light
<p><b>Generally pursuant to Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts, relevant personal information CAN or MUST be shared under one or more of the following circumstances:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To avert or minimize <b>imminent danger</b> to the health and safety of any person; <b>IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, INFORMATION SHARING IS MANDATORY</b></li> <li>• With written consent;</li> <li>• To report criminal activity to the police;</li> <li>• To report a child who may be in need protection under the CFSA (see CFSA Section 72);</li> <li>• By order of the Court;</li> <li>• To facilitate the rehabilitation of a young person (YCJA);</li> <li>• To ensure the safety of students and /or staff (YCJA);</li> <li>• To cooperate with a police and/or a child protection investigation.</li> </ul>	<p><b>In any of the following circumstances obtain more information and/or get advice from your senior manager or legal counsel:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consent is not provided or is refused, but where there may be a health or safety issue for any individual or group(s);</li> </ul> <p><b>To share YCJA records,</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where there is a demand or request to produce information for a legal proceeding;</li> <li>• When a professional code of ethics may limit disclosure.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Information should not be shared under any of the following circumstance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No consent is given and there is no need to know or overriding health/safety concern(s), or no legal authority to share;</li> <li>• Consent is given but there is no need to know or no overriding health/safety concerns;</li> <li>• There is a legislative requirement barring disclosure.</li> </ul>

The Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (M.F.I.P.P.A.) and the Personal Health Information Protection Act (P.H.I.P.A.) provide exceptions for the release of information where there are imminent risks to health and safety.

## When to Share Information cont.

M.F.I.P.P.A., section 5 states that "... [the head of an institution or designate] **shall**, as soon as practicable, disclose any record to the public or persons affected if the head has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that it is in the public interest to do so, and that the record reveals a grave...health or safety hazard."

- Section 32(h) of MFIPPA allows for the disclosure of personal information without the consent of the individual "in compelling circumstances affecting the health and safety of an individual..."  
PHIPA notes that, "a health information custodian may disclose personal health information about an individual if the custodian believes on reasonable grounds, that the disclosure is necessary for the purpose of eliminating or reducing a significant risk of serious bodily harm to a person or group of persons." (2004, c. 3, Sched. A, s. 40(1) P.H.I.P.A.)
- See "Fact Sheet: Disclosure of Information permitted in Emergency or Other Urgent Circumstances", Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, July 2005.  
<http://www.ipc.on.ca/images/Resources/fact-07-e.pdf>

*Also see*, "Practice Tool for Exercising Discretion: Emergency Disclosure of Personal Information by Universities, Colleges and Other Educational Institutions", Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario & Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia, October 2008.  
<http://www.ipc.on.ca/english/Resources/News-Releases/News-Releases-Summary/?id=811>

- Section 125(6), Youth Criminal Justice Act (Y.C.J.A.) enables information in a Y.C.J.A. record to be shared, within the access periods set out in section 119(2), YCJA, with any professional or other person engaged in the supervision or care of a young person – including the representative of any school board, or school or any other educational or training institution only in limited circumstances. Information may be shared to ensure the safety of staff, students or other to facilitate rehabilitation/reintegration of the young person, or to ensure compliance with a Youth Justice Court Order or any order of the Provincial Director respecting reintegration leave. Such sharing of information does not require the young person's consent.

## Communications

### Media

The School Board and community partners involved in the evaluation of risk should develop a *joint press release* when possible. In all other cases, the Board of Education shall take the lead role in managing media relations when it pertains to a student from their School Board.

### Parents, Staff, Students:

This kind of communication should be directed by the school based administration, in consultation with the appropriate Superintendent(s). Use of Synervoice, where available, written communication and information posted on the Board and/or school website is recommended.

## Communications cont.

### **Fair Notice to Parents/Guardian:**

It will be the responsibility of the Principal of each school in accordance with their own School Board policy, to provide Fair Notice to the parents annually. Prior to the V.T.R.A. Protocol being implemented, all students, staff and parents should be provided with information about the Protocol so that all are clear in advance that violence and threats of violence will not be tolerated. (See a sample letter in the Operating Guide, Appendix F).

### **Documentation:**

The Threat Risk Assessment Report Forms, Summary Report, Intervention Plan and Plan of Action will be the formal written documentation from the Stage One or Two V.T.R.A.

**Note:** The recording of any information must be fact-based only and contain no opinions. It should be general in nature and not contain specific statements made by specific individuals.

Only information required for the V.T.R.A can be shared and only with the protocol partners involved in that particular assessment. Information cannot be *redistributed or exchanged* except for the purposes of the assessment itself.

A copy of the V.T.R.A. will be distributed to each community partner present at the meeting *only*. The V.T.R.A. will be stored in a separate file at the School Board. The Summary Report of the V.T.R.A., the Intervention Plan and Plan of Action will be reviewed with the parent and student subject of the V.T.R.A. prior to being stored in the Ontario Student Record (O.S.R.).

**Important:** The recipient of *youth justice* information is responsible for ensuring compliance with legislated restrictions on its use and disposal under Y.C.J.A. ss.125 (7). This provision requires that the information received must be kept separate from any other record of the young person, that no other person can get access to the information except as authorized under the Y.C.J.A. or for the purposes of ss.125 (6) and that it must be destroyed when it is no longer needed for the purpose for which it was disclosed.

### **Note Taking:**

In order to ensure the accuracy of the notes taken during the Stage One and Two V.T.R.A., only one person will be designated as the scribe. This person will have the responsibility of recording the notes during the process. Anyone else involved in the V.T.R.A who makes notes are to manage their information according to their own organizational policies and legislative requirements. Anyone taking notes could be subject to subpoena or a Freedom of Information request.

### **Release of V.T.R.A. Information and Disclosure:**

Documentation will be maintained in compliance with legal requirements of each partner with respect to disclosure. Each partner will vet their own information in accordance with the legislation that governs their release of information.

The V.T.R.A. Summary Report, Intervention Plan and Plan of Action should be reviewed with the parents and may be released to the parents if requested.

### **Release of V.T.R.A. Information and Disclosure:**

However, students and others who may be involved have a right to privacy. If the parents choose to make a formal F.O.I. request to obtain the full assessment, the contents of the document provided by a partner must be vetted by each participating community partner first prior to release.

## **Involving Parents in Threat Risk Assessment**

### **Reasons for Parent/Guardian Notification:**

- When the threats are “clear, direct and plausible” or the School or Community Threat Assessment Partners feels violence may be imminent, notification of the parents will occur unless evidence could be compromised.
- However, if the threat is *not* clear, direct and plausible, the School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.) will continue to collect data, to determine the level of risk before the parents/guardians are notified in order to prevent unnecessary trauma when no risk is actually present.
- Parents/guardians can play an important role in gathering insight and data regarding the “bedroom dynamic” by their knowledge of increases or decreases in baseline behaviours and other contextual factors that may be either “risk reducing” or “risk enhancing”.
- A collaborative approach will provide more information to make a complete assessment and will support the appropriate intervention.

### **Reasons for Delay of Parent /Guardian Notification:**

- If a student discloses child abuse during the threat risk assessment process, Children’s Aid Society will collaborate with the School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.) on the appropriate timing (if at all) of parent/guardian notification as part of their child protection investigation.

### **Reasons for Delay of Parent /Guardian Notification:**

- If notifying the parent increases the threat risk, it may be necessary to protect the student from further harm.

### **Reasons for Not Contacting Parents:**

- If the student is 18 years of age or older.

## **Consider Locker/Bedroom Dynamics**

Although not exclusive, the examination of these locations can often help to locate evidence that supports that the threat maker is engaging in behaviours consistent with their threat.

Other areas to consider include: backpacks, school desk, and student’s vehicles. The bedroom dynamic is the domain of the police to obtain legal informed voluntary consent to search the bedroom of the threat maker.

## **V.T.R.A. and Suspension/Expulsion from School**

In most cases, unless the individual of concern already poses an imminent or an obvious safety concern, the School Team (S.T.A.T.) is activated and the Stage One Report Form data is collected before suspension is even considered. The principal's option to apply a suspension is high risk at this period because it can be viewed by the threat maker as the "last straw". It is in this stage that many threat makers decide to finalize a plan to terrorize the school or attack a specific target. The suspension may not cause the violence to occur but may create the necessary context for the high risk student to take the final step from planning to action.

One must consider that isolation and disconnection felt by high risk students during a suspension/expulsion, away from school premises, may be exacerbated if steps are not taken to keep the student connected to healthy support networks.

In Ontario, mandatory and legislated programs (for long term suspended and expelled students) are offered by every School Board. *Never threaten to use the V.T.R.A. process as a disciplinary measure or to gain compliance.*

*Note: Threat Assessment is not a disciplinary measure!*

## **Students with Special Needs**

The V.T.R.A. Protocol will not be activated when students with special needs engage in threat-making or aggressive behaviours that are typical to their "baseline". In other words, if their conduct is consistent with their diagnoses and how it has been known to manifest in them, then the team will not be called upon to conduct an assessment. For instance, some students with special needs may have histories of verbal threatening when they are frustrated and make statements such as, "I'm going to take a knife and kill you" as part of their typical baseline. This would not result in the activation of the team.

However, if the student with special needs moves beyond their typical baseline and for the first time is caught with a knife in their possession or threatened a target with a knife in their hand, then the team would be activated to assist in determining why the increase in baseline and do they pose a risk to self or others?

Once the School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.) is activated, the process of data collection and assessment is not modified other than to ensure appropriate interviewing strategies with the student with special needs. Staff members from the school and School Board level responsible for program planning and service delivery to students with special needs will always be consultants to the team in these cases.

Good case management with students with special needs means that school officials should already about these students than others as program planning requires comprehensive assessment.

## **Students with Special Needs cont.**

This foundational knowledge about the student means that any significant shift in baseline that meets the criteria for the protocol activation is easily identified: the purpose of the team would be to assist with determining why the increase in baseline and then contribute to the intervention planning.

There are times when students with special needs have had a “slow but steady” increase in the “frequency” and “intensity” of their violence or acting out behaviours. In these cases, there may not be a single incident prompting a Stage One V.T.R.A. but information may emerge that requires the benefit of all or some of the members of the Community Threat Assessment Partners (C.T.A.P.) Team including: Mental Health, Children’s Services, Probation, Hospital Psychiatric Units or special program units (e.g., Addiction Services), and others who can be utilized to assist with more general violence risk assessment and intervention planning.

Sometimes schools and community members may under-react to a serious threat posed by a student with special needs, assuming that all of their behaviours are caused by or are a result of their diagnoses rather than consider that a student with special needs can move along a pathway of “justification” as well.

The same dynamics that can increase the risk of violence in the general student population can also be factors in contributing to the violence potential of the student with special needs, independent of their diagnosis.

## **Working with Members of Diverse Ethnic Communities**

When conducting a V.T.R.A., it is imperative that cultural and ethnic consideration is given regarding the content and the phrasing of questions.

Members of some cultures may experience significant barriers. These factors, along with possible distrust of authority figures and invention can lead to the presence of multiple stressors that increase the perceived or actual level of risk.

When language barriers exist, it is vital, if possible, that respondents speak in their first language and that a neutral interpreter is utilized. Similarly, it is vital that the individuals involved in the V.T.R.A. are familiar with the cultural backgrounds of all parties being interviewed and that whenever possible at least one member of the team is the identified “specialist” in that area.

If there is no S.T.A.T. member with adequate proficiency in a given language, then with consent, another professional may be brought in as a consultant to the team. Ideally, when possible at least one team member is of the same cultural background as respondents from diverse ethnic communities.

## **Anonymous Threats: Assessment and Intervention**

- Typically threats to commit acts of violence against someone or a specific group of people, or a site (e.g., school).
- Places where these are typically located include areas such as: the washrooms, posted on the Internet, anonymous phone calls (e.g., bomb threats) or anonymous letters left in conspicuous places (e.g., teacher's desk).

The lack of ownership/authorship of the threat generally denotes a lack of commitment.

*As of this writing, there are no known North American cases where an anonymous threat to kill was issued and a homicide occurred on the day the threat stated.*

Nevertheless, there are steps that should be followed to:

1. Assess the anonymous threat;
2. Attempt to identify the threat maker;
3. Avoid or minimize the crisis/trauma response.

## **Assessing the Threat**

### **1. V.T.R.A. team should consider the following:**

- Amount of detail (location where the violence is to occur, target(s), date, time, justification etc.);
- Threatened to do what with what (kill, murder, ruin your lives, shank, shoot, etc);
- Method of delivery of the threat (who found /received the threat, when did they receive it, where did they receive it, who else did they tell and who else knows about it);
- Is the threat *clear, direct, plausible and consistent?*

### **2. Identifying the Threat Maker**

In many cases, the author is never found; however, these steps can be taken to identify the culprit as follows:

- Hand writing analysis;
- Word usage (phrases or expressions that are unique to a particular person/group);
- Spelling (errors or modifications unique to a particular person or group).

## **Unauthored Threats: Assessment and Intervention cont.**

### **Contra-indicators:**

- Some authors will switch gender and try to lead the reader to believe they are a boy/ girl when they are not, or they pretend to be someone else as a set-up.
- Some individuals who write anonymous “hit lists” embed their own names in the list of the identified targets.
- Some individuals who report having found the anonymous threat are either the author or know who the author is.
- Depending on the severity of the threat, staff or some students may be asked to assist in analyzing the anonymous threat.

## **Bullying Intervention**

The V.T.R.A. model has always been intended for both violence prevention and multi-disciplinary threat/risk assessment. When applied appropriately, it is also an early intervention model and certainly a bullying prevention model as well.

School staff and others should pay attention to “worrisome behaviours”, by becoming aware of subtle signs and indicators that a bully is or may be targeting a student, or who may be bullied as this information may not be readily disclosed.

The hypothesis of a “conspiracy of two or more” should be considered in bullying cases as well. Sometimes the identified bully is the primary student of concern. However in some cases, the identified bully is actually just the “puppet” of another student (or group of students) in the background who is masterminding the whole bully-victim dynamic.

To intervene in bullying cases before they escalate to violence or suicide, collaboration is needed to address issues that may seem unconnected but are actually part of an ongoing bullying situation. The V.T.R.A. model could identify whether outright violence or subtle bullying, that some things start in the community and finish at school, or vice versa.

“Naturally open” schools have an increased openness by concerned students and bystanders to “report” to adults when someone is in need. The V.T.R.A. model may assist schools in identifying and preventing the extreme acts of bullying.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Definitions**

**Community Threat Assessment Partners (C.T.A.P.)** - Community Threat Assessment Partners Team will come together with the School Threat Assessment Team members to evaluate the risk a student poses to self/others and will develop a cross sector risk management and Intervention Plan to ensure safety and support.

**High Risk Behaviours** – words or actions that express a potential intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. “High Risk” behaviours include but are not limited to: interest in violent content, unusual interest in setting fires, and escalation of physical aggression, significant change in anti-social behavior, unusual interest in or possession of a weapon or replica, bomb threats, threatened violence, internet threat to be violent or kill or cause injury to self and/or others.

**Immediate Threat** - in this case, always call “911” and then contact the school administrator or designate. The school will contact the School/Safe School Superintendent who will then contact the Director of Education. In consultation with each other, the Superintendent or Principal will activate the V.T.R.A. Team.

**Lead** – the person designated by an agency or school board named in the Protocol to be the point of contact when a Stage Two V.T.R.A is required.

**Naturally Open** - is a school system where the leadership openly shares information relevant to each level of the system and all levels of the system openly share information with the leadership.

**Plan of Action** - a chart that depicts the goals, recommendations, actions, respective persons responsible and projected date of completion and is included as part of the Intervention Plan.

**School Threat Assessment Team (S.T.A.T.)** - a team of school based professionals, principals, senior administrators, teaching staff and support staff, trained to assess a threat by a student or a group of students. Consultation with the appropriate Superintendent should occur.

**Risk vs. Violent Threat Risk Assessment (V.T.R.A.)** - Violence Threat Risk Assessment is the process of determining if a threat maker actually poses a risk to the target or targets they have threatened. Risk assessment is the process of determining if an individual of concern may pose a further risk to some target or a risk to some unknown targets at some unknown period. The risk assessment is derived from one or a series of worrisome behaviours or high risk behaviours.

**School Boards** – includes the Provincial Schools Branch.

**Threat** - is the expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. Threats can be spoken, written or symbolic and can be classified as direct, indirect, veiled or conditional.

**Definitions cont.**

**V.T.R.A.** - Violence Threat Risk Assessment is the acronym for this Protocol model.

**Worrisome** - Those behaviours that cause concern and may indicate that a student is moving toward a greater risk of violent behavior. These behaviours include but are not limited to drawing pictures that contain violence, writings that contain violence, making vague or generalized statements about violence towards others that do not constitute a threat as defined by law. However, the nature of the threat may cause concern for some members of the school community because of their violent content.

The majority of high risk behavior, from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12, falls into this category. All worrisome behaviours must be communicated to the V.T.R.A. Team and/or community members for consultation. In these cases, the team is not activated formally. The Principal consults with the community member or another professional who knows the student and decides if a Stage One needs to be activated. In many cases, follow up on worrisome behaviours results in good intervention measures. There are also cases where “a little data leads to a lot” and what seems like a minor case can quickly evolve to the formal activation of the V.T.R.A. Team.