

## About the Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) Model

This protocol reflects the work of J. Kevin Cameron, Executive Director of the North American Center for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (NACTATR). It fosters timely sharing of information about a child or youth who poses a risk of violence toward themselves or others. It is the process of deliberately trying to “connect the dots” that paints the picture that a person is moving on a path toward serious violence before a violent act occurs. The protocol promotes supportive and preventive plans being put in place in order to keep all members of our school community’s safe, including students who may pose a risk. In Pembina Trails, we aim to keep students in school and connected to positive influences. The strength of this model is its collaborative and multidisciplinary approach which makes use of a broad range of expertise among VTRA team members. This collaborative process will respect an individual’s rights to privacy to the fullest extent possible.

## Importance of a Safe School Culture

School culture/climate is widely acknowledged as being a key to creating a safe environment. Healthy, safe school cultures offer students clearly articulated proactive and pro-social standards of conduct to which all parties are held accountable and are environments where positive interactions and social responsibility are actively promoted and valued. It is critical for students themselves to be actively involved in the development of safe school initiatives and programming.

A safe school culture creates an environment where violence is less likely to occur and where systems are in place to allow for early identification of potential problems. Schools with a positive and safe school culture are places where:

- All students are praised and celebrated.
- Students have positive peer and adult role models.
- Social emotional learning is embraced by students and teachers.
- Communication is open, honest, respectful and timely.
- Resources and supports are available to those who need.
- Relationships are valued.

For information about the Pembina Trails School Division [Standard of Behaviour](#) and [VTRA policy](#), visit [www.pembinatrails.ca](http://www.pembinatrails.ca).

## Need for Training

This document is not a substitute for training in the field of violence threat risk assessment. It is intended to be used by multidisciplinary teams trained in the theory and practice of youth violence threat risk assessment and to help guide the process of VTRA in the Pembina Trails School Division.

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This protocol follows the VTRA model developed initially in 2001 by Kevin Cameron and Glen Woods. This VTRA model has been revised numerous times since and the current Level I training manual is in its ninth edition. For more information on the history and mission of this VTRA model for schools and communities, see the [North American Center for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response](#) (NACTATR).

The Pembina Trails School Division has developed a divisional VTRA Level I training team. This team consists of the Coordinator of Clinical Services, school administrators and clinicians. Each member has been certified by the NACTATR to provide VTRA Level I training. The Pembina Trails School Division is committed to the training of school administration and staff who make up school-based VTRA teams. Level I training is provided each year by the Pembina Trails VTRA training team. Level II is provided generally bi-annually and is delivered by a training member of the NACTATR.

## MISSION

Pembina Trails is dedicated to educational excellence through challenging and enriching experiences for all, in a safe and caring community.

## VALUES

In the Pembina Trails School Division, we value:

- The learning and dignity, respect and well-being of all.
- A safe and welcoming environment.
- The diversity and the uniqueness of all.
- A shared common purpose that inspires and strengthens our commitment, responsibility and accountability to each other.
- Honest, respectful and timely communications.
- Participation in ongoing, collaborative decision making processes.
- Social and environmental responsibility.
- Vision, innovation, enthusiasm and involvement.

## VISION

In the Pembina Trails School Division, our vision is to:

- Promote challenging learning opportunities that support individual growth in a respectful environment.
- Ensure a welcoming environment where everyone is emotionally and physically safe.
- Care for each other and the world in which we live.
- Promote a sense of community and belonging by valuing meaningful participation in decision-making.
- Recognize and celebrate the unique and diverse gifts of all.
- Commit to a common purpose that will inspire combined efforts to achieve outstanding results and personal satisfaction.
- Communicate effectively by sharing information in an honest, respectful manner.
- Embrace purposeful change and renewal.
- Live our values.

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## THE VTRA TEAM

### VTRA Team Membership

The Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) team is a multidisciplinary team (school administration, clinician(s), counsellor, resource teacher, police, etc.) trained to identify students and situations that would cause students to potentially traumatize their school through violence, threats of violence, or other disruptive behaviours. Members are also trained to intervene in a proactive way to eliminate or minimize the negative impact these behaviours could have on students, staff, parents and community.

The team constitutes an experienced, knowledgeable group that reviews threats and worrisome behaviours, consults with division staff and community-based contacts as appropriate and provides recommendations and advice to school administration or designate. Note that if a member of the team is threatened, that member should not be the team member designated to interview the threat maker. It is strongly recommended that a police officer should either be included as a member of the team or regularly consulted as a resource person.

#### Initial VTRA Response Team:

- School administration (principal, vice-principal, teacher in charge)
- School-based student services team members (counsellors, resource teachers)
- Division-based student services team members (school psychologists, school social workers, student services consultants, Coordinator of Clinical Services)

#### Additional VTRA Team Members:

- School Resource Officers (Winnipeg Police Service)
- Community service providers (e.g. MATC, Youth Crisis Services)
- Child and Family Services and related child welfare agencies (e.g. Child Protection)
- Additional community members may be added, if available, at the discretion of the VTRA team (e.g. family physician, therapist, community agencies and supports)

### Function of the VTRA Team

The primary function of the VTRA team is to ensure the **safety of all** members of the school community by following a **systematic process** of responding to threats, violence and high-risk situations. The VTRA team performs functions related to **assessing** violence potential, **sharing** information, **consulting** as a multidisciplinary team, **determining** risk and **planning** risk-reducing interventions.

### When to Activate the VTRA Protocol

#### Immediate Risk Situations

When immediate risk is identified, call 911 and implement the School Safety Plan (e.g. lockdown procedures, hold and secure procedures). Immediate risk situations include, but are not limited to: persons with lethal weapons, dangerous person inside or on periphery of the building, or active shooter scenarios. These are emergency situations requiring immediate police intervention and protection.

In these cases, the VTRA team will be notified/activated when the situation is stabilized. The VTRA team may be utilized following the immediate crisis to assist in crisis and trauma management if required.

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## High Risk Behaviours: Automatic Stage 1 Activation

Categories of behaviours/incidents that warrant automatic Stage 1 activation include, but are not limited to:

- serious violence or violence with the intent to harm or kill another person
- internet, website and social media threats to seriously harm others
- extreme cases of bullying and harassment
- verbal or written threats to seriously harm or kill others or cause significant property damage (clear, direct, plausible)
- possession of weapons – including replicas
- rehearsal behaviours or evidence of planning
- bomb threats – making and detonating explosive devices
- fire setting
- sexual intimidation or assault
- gang-related intimidation and violence
- hate incidents motivated by factors such as race, culture, religion or sexual orientation

## Threats Toward Members of the School Community

Threat assessment rests on two critical principles: first, that all threats and threat-makers are not equal; second, that most threat-makers are unlikely to carry out their threat. However, all threats must be taken seriously and evaluated. A threat is an expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something.

Threats may be written, verbal, drawn, posted online or on social media, or made by gesture only and may be:

DIRECT

INDIRECT

CONDITIONAL

VEILED

Some threats (veiled and indirect) may not meet the standard of law for criminal charges, but do warrant assessment and/or multidisciplinary consultation. An example might be when VTRA team members become aware of a target who is the subject of a gang-related hand sign that denotes “let’s get him” or “take him out”. In other cases, VTRA team members may know that a particular student of concern has used a non-verbal throat-cutting gesture prior to severely beating his targets. In such cases activation of the VTRA team would be appropriate. These situations are often unique to the culture and dynamics of each school and community and threat-making behaviour must be considered within the context in which it occurs.

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## Un-Authored Threats

Un-authored threats are typically threats to commit a violent act against an individual, a group of individuals, or a specific site – such as a school. These may be found written on bathroom walls or stalls, spray painted on the side of schools, posted on the Internet (e.g. anonymous social media platform) or as unsigned notes left in a conspicuous place, such as on a teacher’s desk.

In the field of school-based violence threat and risk assessment, the lack of ownership of the threat generally denotes a lack of commitment. Nevertheless, the school team should attempt to identify the threat maker and assess the level of risk. It is also important to minimize the crisis or traumatic impact on others.

VTRA teams should consider the following in determining the initial level of risk based on the current data:

- What is the “language of commitment?”
- How much detail is included – the location where the violence is to occur, specific target(s), date and time the violence is to occur, justification?
- What is the method of delivery for the threat – who found or received the threat and when and where was it received?
- Is the threat clear, direct and plausible?

In many cases, the author is never found, but steps can be taken to identify who the author is:

- handwriting analysis
- word usage – phrases and expressions that may be unique to a particular person or group
- spelling – errors or modifications unique to an individual or group
- font and writing style

## Worrisome Behaviours

Worrisome behaviours are those that cause concern for members of the school community and may indicate that a student is moving toward the risk of serious violent behaviour. Worrisome behaviours include, but are not limited to:

- writing stories, journal entries and blog posts that contain violent content
- social media messaging/posting that implies violent ideation
- drawing pictures of a violent nature
- making vague threatening statements
- unusual interest in fire
- significant increase in anti-social behaviour
- any significant change in baseline behaviour

In these cases, the VTRA team is not automatically activated. However, these warning signs should not be ignored. In keeping with the duty to respond to threat-related behaviour, all worrisome behaviours will be communicated to school administration or designate who will consult with members of the VTRA team to determine the course of action. Often, the school administrator will assemble the VTRA team for consultation, but not formal Stage 1 activation. The purpose of this consultation is to decide as a

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multidisciplinary team whether or not to move to a Stage 1 assessment, to document the incident/worrisome behaviour, and to determine immediate risk-reducing interventions as appropriate. Parents/guardians shall be contacted and involved in follow up planning as required.

In many cases, following up on worrisome behaviours can result in good, early intervention. 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 VTRA team.

### **Suicidal Ideation and Self-Injury as a Special Consideration**

When school-based professionals (e.g., school administration, school social workers, school psychologists) are dealing with a situation where an individual is of concern for suicidal ideation or behaviour because they are presenting a number of risk factors, they should follow existing divisional policies, procedures, and guidelines for suicide risk assessment (see also [Best Practices in School-Based Suicide Prevention; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2014](#)). Therefore, as a standard, it is not a category for VTRA Protocol activation.

However, those trained in suicide risk assessment should be VTRA trained and be open to the possibility that the individual being assessed may be “fluid” (movement between the homicidal and suicidal domains). The VTRA Protocol should only be used as part of a suicidal ideation case when there is evidence of:

- fluidity
- suicide pact
- conspiracy of two or more (for example, a “puppet master”)
- multiple suicides in quick succession in a community

### **Non-School Hour Cases**

If information is received by a VTRA team member regarding serious violence, weapons possession or a threat that is *clear, direct and plausible* during non-work hours, the School Resource Officer/Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) will be called. In consultation with the WPS, immediate actions may be taken to ensure the safety of those at risk. Following these actions, the VTRA team will be activated to determine if the situation has the potential to pose an ongoing risk to members of the school community.

### **Students with Diverse Learning Needs and VTRA**

Special consideration will be taken into account when students with diverse learning needs engage in threat-making or aggressive behaviours. In these cases, it is necessary to consider the presenting behaviour in the context of the student’s identified learning needs and/or diagnosis(ses). In other words, *if the student’s conduct is consistent with their diagnosis and typical baseline behaviour, then a VTRA response is not required.*

However, if the student with diverse needs moves beyond their typical baseline – either a single incident or a slow-and-steady increase – and is engaged in high-risk behaviour, the VTRA team will be activated and the multidisciplinary team will determine the appropriate course of action. Other professionals involved with the student (i.e. Speech and Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Psychologist, Psychiatrist, medical professionals) may be consulted to assist in establishing context for the threat-making or aggressive behaviour.

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The role of the VTRA team is to determine why there was an increase in the baseline behaviour and whether the student poses a risk to self or others. The process of data collection and assessment is not modified other than to ensure the appropriate interviewing strategies are used for the student with diverse needs.

### **Early Elementary-Aged Children and VTRA**

When younger students engage in violent or threat-related behaviours, developmental and exceptionality issues need to be taken into consideration. Generally speaking, most threat-related behaviour exhibited by elementary-aged students would fall into the category of “worrisome behaviours”. However, just because a student is elementary age does not mean they cannot or do not pose a risk. If high-risk behaviours are identified (i.e. significant increase in baseline behaviour, weapons possession, fire starting, clear, direct and plausible threats), a VTRA protocol should be activated.

### **VTRA REMINDERS**

#### **VTRA Trumps Suspension**

In most cases, unless the individual of concern already poses an imminent or obvious safety concern such as brandishing a weapon, a Stage 1 VTRA should occur before suspension is considered.

A poorly timed out-of-school suspension can be a risky response as the suspension may be viewed by a high-risk student (i.e. primed for violence) as the last straw. Experience has shown that it is during a suspension that many threat makers decide to finalize a plan to terrorize a school or attack a specific target, which can include suicidal or homicidal acts. The suspension does not cause the violence to occur, but can create the necessary context for a student who is already struggling with suicidal or homicidal ideation to take the final step, from planning to taking action. It is often the case that a student can be monitored more closely at school.

School administration is responsible to determine whether suspension is warranted, but consultation with the VTRA team should always be a precursor to a final decision on the matter. If suspension is necessary, a critical question beyond “when to suspend” is “where to suspend?” Consider an in-school suspension if possible. The isolation and disconnection felt by high-risk students during an out of school suspension may be exacerbated if steps are not taken to keep the student connected to healthy adult supports.

It is especially important that a school not deal with threats of violence by simply kicking the problem out the door. Expelling or suspending a student for engaging in high-risk and/or threat-making behaviour must not be a substitute for careful assessment and a considered, consistent plan of intervention. Disciplinary action alone, unaccompanied by any effort to evaluate the threat or the student’s intent, may actually increase the risk of violence. For instance, if a student feels unfairly treated and becomes even angrier and more intent on carrying out a violent act, they may feel justified in committing violence.

With the above information in mind, when data suggests that a student poses a threat to others, they may be suspended from school until a more comprehensive assessment can be conducted. The VTRA team may assist in guiding the process from initial assessment, to planning interventions to decrease risk, to planning for re-entry into a school where a suspension has occurred. The school administrator, with the aid of the VTRA team, may outline in writing the steps/actions required (i.e. interviews required, appropriate assessments conducted, daily plan in place) prior to re-entry into the school.

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## VTRA Is Not a Disciplinary Measure

It is not appropriate for school administration to consider the VTRA process as a disciplinary measure. For instance, an administrator who tells a student of concern *“if you engage in similar behaviour again, a threat assessment will be conducted”* has essentially done a VTRA on their own and determined the person does not pose a risk. This process is contrary to the purpose of VTRA and is an example of a dangerous unidimensional practice. The purpose of a VTRA is ultimately supportive and to determine the plausibility of risk, not to be a punitive measure.

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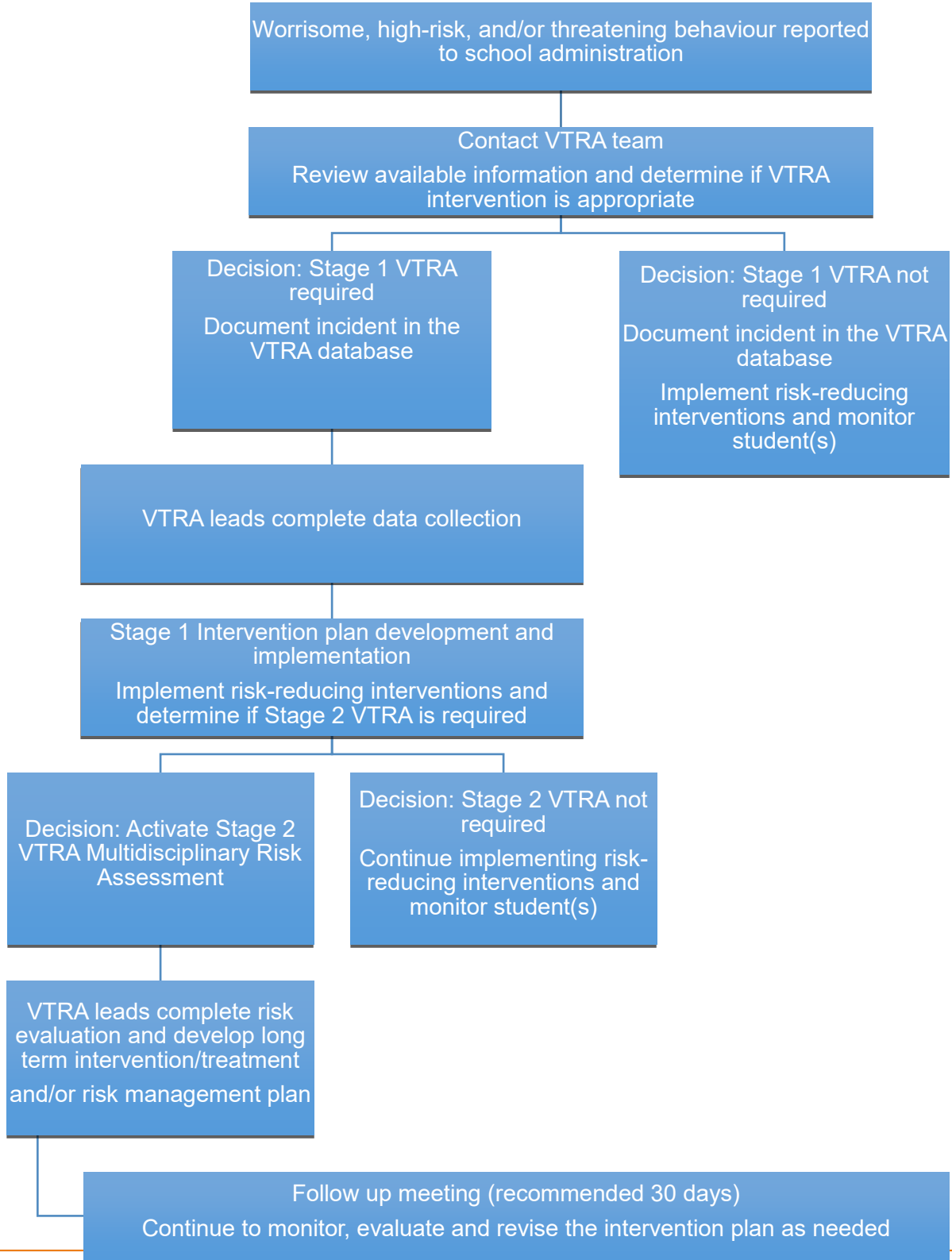
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## VTRA Response Flow Chart



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## Stage 1 VTRA

Good Data/Good Assessment/Good Intervention.

Stage 1 VTRA tasks include:

- Gathering as a VTRA team and delegating roles. For instance, it is at this stage that the VTRA team decides on who will need to be interviewed, who will conduct the interviews, who will conduct the locker check, who will conduct the background check and the process around notifying parents.
- Collect data and relevant contextual information.
- Determine immediate risk-reducing interventions.
- Develop Stage 1 data-driven intervention plan.
- Determine whether or not a Stage 2 VTRA is required.

The primary purpose of Stage 1 VTRA is to:

- Determine if the threat maker poses a risk to the target(s) being threatened.
- Determine if the threat maker poses a risk of violence in general or in the future.
- Plan immediate interventions for any risk factors identified.

### Immediate Safety Considerations

- It is not a VTRA if there is imminent danger or the threat is time sensitive. Call 911.
- If needed, implement a lockdown as per the school's procedures.
- Ensure you know the whereabouts of the threat-maker(s) and target(s). If necessary and/or if possible, appropriately monitor or detain the student(s) of concern until police arrive. Do not allow student(s) of interest access to coats, backpacks, desks, lockers or cell phones.
- It is essential to determine if the threat-maker has immediate access to the means to carry out a threat such as a knife or gun. Sometimes, there is evidence of planning or weapons in the threat-maker's locker at school, in their bedroom at home or both. The school owns the locker dynamic and this must be attended to in each incident. The school administration searches the student's locker, backpack, desk, cell phone and car. In most cases, the parents/guardians own the bedroom dynamic and will carry out the search required. In some instances, police may be involved in searches that occur within the context of the home or community.

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## The Interview Process

Who should be interviewed?

- > the person(s) who reported the concern
- > potential target(s) or victim(s)
- > witnesses
- > peers, siblings
- > employer (if student has employment)
- > parents/guardians, caregivers, agency workers
- > teachers and other school staff as needed (e.g. educational assistants, caretakers, bus driver, coach)

### Important considerations:

When possible, the student of concern should be interviewed AFTER the initial data is collected such as locker check completed, collateral interviews completed and background check completed/in progress. This information will provide the interviewers with the data required to develop hypotheses and specific questions prior to the strategic VTRA interview.

No more than two people should be present when interviewing the student of concern – one of whom must be a VTRA-trained clinician.

Depending on the severity of the case, one VTRA team member may serve as the primary interviewer to ensure continuity of data collection and interviewing technique. The higher the level of potential risk, the more appropriate it is to use a primary interviewer to lead the process. When criminal charges are likely, the police member of the VTRA team (i.e. School Resource Officer) may take the lead; when mental health issues appear to be the primary concern, a VTRA-trained clinician may take the lead, etc.

### Involving Parents/Caregivers/Guardians in the VTRA Process

Legal guardians of the student of concern and of students deemed targets or witnesses should be notified at the earliest opportunity. Specifically, notification should occur after the VTRA team has collected the initial data and have a clear picture of what has occurred. Notifying legal guardians is a school administrator's responsibility and is an opportunity to set a compassionate, caring yet firm and curious tone about the need to work together to support the student.

*Taking the time required and following good process to gather initial data can prevent overreaction in those involved. Good process will increase the sense of safety and reduce the anxiety and fear for all members of the school community.*

Keep in mind that the parent(s) or caregiver(s) are also part of the assessment process, as they are necessary sources of insight and data regarding the *bedroom dynamic*, *increases or decreases in baseline*, and other contextual factors that may be either *risk-reducing* or *risk-enhancing*. As such, notification of parent(s) or caregiver(s) is meant to activate a collaborative process between home and school to more fully understand the situation and collaboratively plan for appropriate and compassionate intervention where necessary. However, if for some reason there is a reluctance to participate in the process, by the student of concern or his/her parent/guardian(s), the threat assessment process will continue in order to ensure a safe and caring learning environment for all. (See Appendix A: Fair Notice and Practice brochure)

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Checklist for notifying legal guardians:

- ✓ Provide basic information about the incident and reassure steps are being taken to mitigate immediate risk.
  
- ✓ Explain the VTRA response is not intended to be disciplinary, rather it is a collaborative process to assess risk and ensure safety of all.
  
- ✓ Explain that data collection is an important part of the VTRA process and their perspective is integral to developing a plan of support for their child.
  
- ✓ Advise them that the VTRA team has been activated and that the team consists of member of the divisional Clinical Services department.
  
- ✓ Schedule a time for them to come in for a meeting – after the Stage 1 data collection is completed.

**Determining Level of Risk**

Following the Stage 1 data collection, the VTRA team should come back together to collate data and discuss all relevant information regarding the threat, violent incident or high-risk situation. The team will make a multi-disciplinary, data-based determination of risk. The Stage 1 assessment will be completed and the VTRA team will indicate whether the risk of immediate harm is Low, Moderate or High.

It is important to make this determination prior to implementing long term interventions so as to ensure that the interventions are consistent with and responsive to the level of risk posed by the student. Again, it is important that the VTRA team keep in mind the negative implications of either under responding or over-responding.

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**LOW -**

Risk to the target(s), students, staff and school safety is minimal.

- Threat is vague and indirect.
- Information contained within the threat is inconsistent, implausible or lacks detail; threat lacks realism.
- Available information suggests that the person is unlikely to carry out the threat or become violent.
- The threat is within the general range of typical baseline behaviour for the student of concern.

Actions:

- Create an intervention plan.
- The student can likely be managed at school with appropriate monitoring and school-based interventions.
- Contact the school's SAT link as well as the Coordinator of Clinical Services to advise of the outcome of the Stage 1 VTRA.

**MODERATE -**

The threat could be carried out, although it may not appear entirely realistic. Violent action is possible.

- Threat is more plausible and concrete than a low level threat. Wording in the threat and information gathered suggests that some thought has been given to how the threat will be carried out (i.e. possible place and time).
- No clear indication that the threat maker has taken preparatory steps (i.e. looking for/securing weapons), although there may be an ambiguous or inconclusive references pointing to that possibility. There may be a specific statement seeking to convey that the threat is not empty: "I'm serious!"
- Moderate or lingering concerns about the student's potential to act violently.
- Concerning increase in baseline behaviour.

Actions:

- Create an intervention plan.
- The student may be managed at school with intensive monitoring and school-based interventions.
- Contact the school's SAT link as well as the Coordinator of Clinical Services to advise of the outcome of the Stage 1 VTRA.
- A Stage 2 VTRA may be required.

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## HIGH -

The threat or situation of concern appears to pose an imminent and serious danger to the safety of others.

- Threat is specific and plausible. There is an identified target. Student has the capacity to act on the threat.
- Information suggests concrete steps have been taken toward acting on threat. For example, information indicates that the student has acquired or practiced with a weapon or has had a victim under surveillance.
- Information suggests strong concern about the student's potential to act violently.
- Significant increase in baseline behaviour.

### Actions:

- Contact the school's SAT link as well as the Coordinator of Clinical Services to advise of the outcome of the Stage 1 VTRA.
- Create an intervention plan that addresses immediate safety concerns.
- A Stage 2 VTRA is required.
- It is necessary to involve the school's SAT link, the Coordinator of Clinical Services, the School Resource Officer and other agencies (if appropriate) in a multi-disciplinary meeting.
- **If there is imminent danger, call 911 (i.e. a gun is found).**

## Planning Risk-Reducing Interventions

Once the level of risk has been determined, a primary function of the VTRA process is to determine effective risk-reducing interventions. A good understanding of presenting risk factors from an ecological perspective will yield good risk-reducing interventions. At this stage of planning, the VTRA team will collaboratively develop an intervention plan that addresses immediate safety concerns and outlines the steps to be taken to ensure ongoing monitoring, supervision and safety in the school, home and community environments.

See Appendix F: Intervention Plan Report and Appendix G: Intervention Planning Worksheet.

## Stage 2 VTRA

The focus for Stage 2 VTRA is comprehensive risk evaluation and intervention planning by a multi-disciplinary team. Members of the VTRA team alongside other collaborating agencies and parents/guardians come together to gain a deeper understanding of the child and the context in which the risk is presenting itself. The goal is to create a comprehensive intervention plan which may include referrals to external agencies and/or mental health services. The Stage 2 VTRA process is concerned with longer term intervention and treatment goals.

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The Stage 2 VTRA multi-agency meeting should set out to:

- Review the key findings from the Stage 1 VTRA.
- Discuss the level of risk determined in Stage 1.
- Discuss the risk-reducing interventions determined in Stage 1.
- Identify the roles of all professionals and agencies involved.
- Determine referrals and/or other agency involvement required.
- Establish a channel of communication between all professionals/agencies involved
- Establish follow up meeting dates.

### **Supporting Those Who May Be Impacted**

The school administrator and the VTRA team are responsible for ensuring that any possible victims/targets/witnesses of the threat or violent incident are assessed/followed up with and services are provided as necessary. This may include students, staff, members of the VTRA team, etc. The circumstances around the threat or violent incident (e.g. directed towards one or more individuals, an entire class or the school population) will determine how far reaching the intervention needs to be. The VTRA trained clinicians and the school administrator (in consultation with the school's SAT link and the Coordinator of Clinical Services) should determine if crisis counselling or a crisis response team is needed to re-establish calm.

### **COMMUNICATIONS AND DOCUMENTATION**

#### **Fair Notice**

Prior to any division-wide VTRA protocol being implemented, all students, staff, and parents should be provided with information and details about the protocol and procedures so that fair notice is given. All members of the school community must know that schools have a duty to respond to high-risk and threat-related behaviours. It is the responsibility of school administration to ensure that all staff have knowledge of what constitutes student threat-making behaviours. Staff members shall promptly report any such behaviour to the administration of the school.

A school shall publicize its protocol and procedures around the VTRA process at the beginning of every school year and for new students and families as appropriate. The Fair Notice and Practice brochure (see Appendix A) shall be provided to all parents at the beginning of each school year in the first school newsletter. As well, fair notice will be provided through parent meetings, staff meetings, and staff orientation as appropriate.

Schools shall practice lock down and hold and secure procedures as per divisional expectations.

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## Creating an Expectation of Responsible Reporting

All staff and students need to be advised that any person in a school community having knowledge of high-risk student behaviour or having reasonable grounds to believe there is a potential for high-risk or violent behaviour should promptly report the information to the school's administration. Schools shall promote a culture of responsible reporting among students as well. Each school shall actively teach students that seeking adult support for worrisome behaviour is not ratting or snitching, but rather, a social responsibility for the well-being of all. School staff need to actively counter the code of silence by modeling open communication and responsiveness.

It is also important for all to understand that no action will be taken against a person who makes a report unless the report is made maliciously and without reasonable grounds. In such exceptional cases, the person making the malicious report should be dealt with according to school division policy and law, where applicable.

## Responsible Sharing of Information

Most provinces have legislation that permits information sharing under circumstances where there is imminent danger. It is important to review the relevant legislation and guidelines in Manitoba (Manitoba Pupil File Guidelines, Child Protection Services), and Canada (Youth Justice) to ensure adherence while providing for school safety.

The Supreme Court of Canada has established legal precedent by ruling (in R. vs. M (M.R.)) that in certain situations, the need to protect the greater student population supersedes the individual rights of the student. The ruling explicitly acknowledges that school officials must be able to act quickly and effectively to ensure the safety of the students and to prevent serious violations of the school rules. Two principles relevant to Violence Threat/Risk Assessment Protocols were established by the Supreme Court:

- ***The individual charter rights of the student are lessened to protect the collective need for safety and security of the general student population.***
- ***Schools officials have greater flexibility to respond to ensure the safety of the general student population in an educational setting than law enforcement officials have in a public setting.***

Therefore, if an individual is in possession of information that may indicate that there is an imminent danger to the health and safety of any person or persons and the source of the information is reliable, the information can be shared without consent in the interest of safety. Those whose information is being shared without consent will be informed when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

The Manitoba Pupil File Guidelines (Revised January 2012) outline the process related to third party requests for information (pp. 22-24). A third party is a person, group of persons or an organization other than the person that the information is about and other than the school division or district maintaining the record.

- Regarding personal information, Administrator/VTRA lead may disclose personal information about a pupil (which is not personal health information and which is not youth criminal justice information) if disclosure is necessary to protect the mental or physical health or the safety of any individual or group of individuals (clause 44(1)(l)).

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- Regarding personal health information, Administrator/VTRA lead may disclose personal health information about a pupil if the school division or district reasonably believes that the disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and immediate threat to the mental or physical health or safety of the pupil or another individual or to public health or public safety (clause 22(2)(b)).
- Regarding youth justice information, youth criminal justice information in a pupil file can only be disclosed by school administrator:
  - o to ensure compliance by the pupil with an authorization under section 91 [for reintegration leave or day release] or with an order of the youth justice court (i.e. concerning bail, probation, conditional supervision, etc.);
  - o to ensure the safety of staff, students or other persons; or
  - o to facilitate the rehabilitation of the young person (subsection 125(6) of the YCJA).

In September 2017, the Province of Manitoba proclaimed the Protecting Children (Information Sharing) Act. The act (law) allows government departments, organizations and others who provide services to at-risk and vulnerable children to collect, use and share personal information, including personal health information, about supported children and their parents or legal guardians. Personal information can be shared without consent, only when it is in the best interests of a supported child. The act helps to create an environment where service providers are able to collaborate and better share critical information to protect the safety and well-being of children. For more information, see <https://www.gov.mb.ca/informationsharingact/>.

**Important Note:**

*All participants in the VTRA process are bound by the legislation and policies that guide their agency or organization regarding confidentiality and information sharing. It is their responsibility to know the legislation, take it into account and guide actions accordingly.*

**Youth Criminal Justice Act and VTRA**

All sharing of youth justice information (i.e. relating to young persons aged 12-17 inclusive who are being dealt with under the criminal law) is subject to the nondisclosure provisions under ss. 119(2) of the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

However, Section 126(6) of the Youth Criminal Justice Act enables information in a Youth Criminal Justice Act record to be shared, within the access period, with any professional or other person engaged in the supervision or care of a young person to document this information – including the representative of any school board or school, or any other educational or training institution – in circumstances involving the safety of students, staff or other persons. Information may be shared to ensure the safety of staff and students, to facilitate rehabilitation of the young person, and to ensure compliance with a youth-justice court order – respecting reintegration leave. Such sharing of information does not require the young person’s consent.

The recipient of youth justice information is responsible for ensuring compliance with legislated restrictions on its use and disposal under YCJA ss.126 (7). This provision requires that the information must be kept separate from any other record of the young person, that no other person must have

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access to the information except as authorized under the YCJA 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.

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## Communicating with the Media

As a general rule, schools should follow divisional policy and procedures regarding media relations and media release (see [Policy: KDD](#)). All news releases regarding a situation that is of a sensitive nature and/or has the potential to draw high profile media attention is the responsibility of the Superintendent who is responsible for the coordination of information to the media. The VTRA team or staff members should not independently communicate with the media. Any communication that does take place with the media should model calmness and leadership.

## Documentation and Information Storage

The school division is responsible for storing relevant VTRA documentation, including the VTRA Incident Report and accompanying intervention plans. The documentation is highly confidential and not to be included in the Pupil File. Instead, VTRA documentation is to be stored separately as a critical-incident file. Schools will use the VTRA Incident Report to document this information. Incident Reports and all accompanying files will be kept with the Coordinator of Clinical Services. As well, a copy is stored electronically and is accessible to those with designated access.

Future sharing of information contained in documents about previous VTRA incidents should balance the individual's rights to privacy with the safety and well-being of the child and others. VTRA teams may seek guidance from the school's SAT link as well as the Coordinator of Clinical Services regarding issues around information sharing.

Information pertaining to the assessment of a student's threatening behaviour will be shared on a need-to-know basis as determined by the school administrator in consultation with the VTRA team. When a VTRA assessment has been conducted and the student transitions to a new school, the findings of the assessment shall be shared with the receiving school.

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