

How to Prevent the Bad Things from Happening: Threat Assessments in Congregations

Trudy L. Good, Ph.D.
Director of Good Havens
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We at Good Havens believe . . .

- in creating safety where we work, learn, play, and worship.
- it is possible to prevent bad things from happening.
- that each person is a valuable person and makes meaningful contributions to their communities.

What is Threat Assessment?

- the general process of identifying, evaluating, and mitigating the risk of acts of violence or other forms of harassing or aggressive behavior (Meloy, Hart & Hoffman, 2014).
- law enforcement, prosecutors, mental health professionals, corporate security experts, probation and parole personnel

Some definitions

- targeted violence (predatory violence)—any actual, attempted or planned injury to other people that is intentional and directed toward specific people, as well as any communication or behavior that causes other people to reasonably fear for their health and safety.
- affective violence -- is preceded by autonomic arousal, caused by reaction to perceived threat, and accompanied by intense feelings of anger or fear
- threat —perceived possibility of harm or potential danger.
- threat assessment— presupposes that targeted violence exists, that it is possible to identify signs and behaviors that someone is moving on a ‘pathway’ of violence

Threat Assessment Principles

- It is possible to prevent bad things from happening.
- Safety of everyone is a priority
- Targeted violence follows a progression of Idea, Plan, Acquisition and Implementation.
- Violence is a dynamic process that is the interaction of:
 - The Subject
 - The Target and its vulnerabilities
 - The Environment
 - Precipitating Events
- Focus on behavior, not a profile of someone

Threat Assessment Principles (con't)

- Relies on communication and cooperation between people
- Does the person currently pose a threat? (making a threat is not necessarily a reliable indicator)
- Keep the victims apprised of how risk is being mitigated; their safety is a priority
- Early identification and early mitigation strategies are important to being able to use less intrusive forms of mitigation
- Early identification relies on multiple reporting mechanisms
- Preventing violence is a planful and proactive process, not reactive.

Best Practices for TAM Teams and Processes

- Multidisciplinary team at the congregational level
- The TA team has been granted the authority to engage in threat assessment
- Congregation has identified the necessary resources and activities that support threat assessment operations
- The team establishes and follows standard threat assessment processes and procedures, following best practices when they exist

Resources and Activities of the TAM Team

- Develop a culture of “See something, say something”
- A centralized system of tracking concerns, information and management activities
- Identified person (staff-warden-rector) responsible for tracking and case management
- Clear reporting processes
- Legal counsel input
- Basic training of persons who are on TAMT

When to seek outside help?

- When behavior (hounding, pursuing, tracking) is causing high distress in the victim (TA consultant, Victim Advocacy services)
- When the behavior is illegal or close to illegal behavior (consult with police)
- When there may be mental health concerns or substance use-abuse (trained clinician)
- If target is clergy or staff and the situation is impacting staff's ability to complete their duties (TA consultant)

Importance of On-going Management

- If we are fortunate, we identify potential threats, identify the needs and motivations, and try to address them. We mitigate the risk that the person moves toward violence.
- May include shaping or putting limits on how someone participates in congregational life. May include the need for a specific written plan.
- Remember, violence is a dynamic process. What is not a risk today may be a risk tomorrow and may not be a risk in a month.
- Creating case files that are kept, updated, reviewed as needed. These files should contain the behaviors that have been identified that someone is struggling, needing more support.

Recommendations for UUCUC

January 2023

Recommendations: Communication

- Orientation includes a walk-thru
- Posting emergency contacts at each landline
- Creating shared calendar for staff
- Policy of monitoring online platforms, AV Tech implements
- Weekly standing item in staff meetings about safety concerns, disruptive events. Assign who will follow thru on each.
- Implementation of a TAMT
- Annual review of safety, emergency, codes, mutual respect. Congregational education
- Connection and communication with UPD.

Recommendations: Physical Str & Proc

- Lighting & landscaping improvements
- Lighting assessment of overhang
- Sight lines for entrances/exits, enhance video feed monitoring
- Designated parking spaces

Recommendations: Org policies & proc

- Entry codes, routine review of who has codes
- Persons sleeping under overhang, responsible staff persons, standing topic in staff mtg.
- In 6 months, review security camera policy for food pantry for effectiveness
- Use a sign-in sheet
- Clear Off-boarding procedures for staff; off-boarding for codes of congregants
- Panic buttons
- UUCUC Emergency Plan—revise & implement & educate

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trudygood@goodhavens.org

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