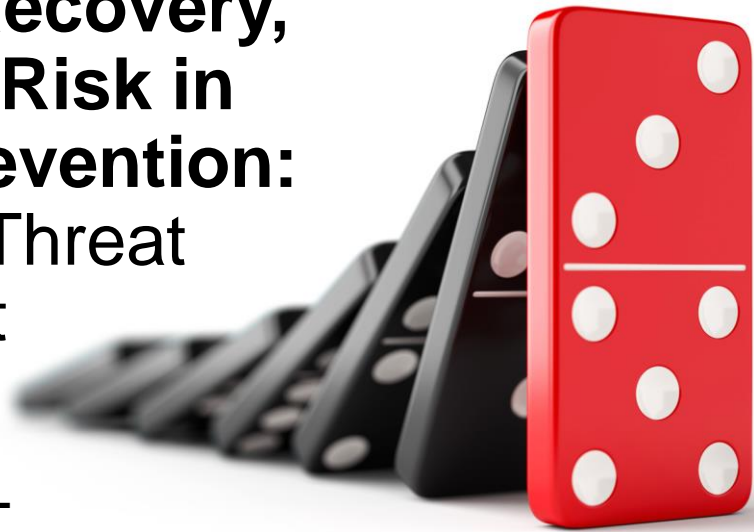# Balancing Recovery, Rights, and Risk in Violence Prevention:
The Role of Threat Management

Jack Rozel, MD, MSL

Rob Ambrosini, PsyD

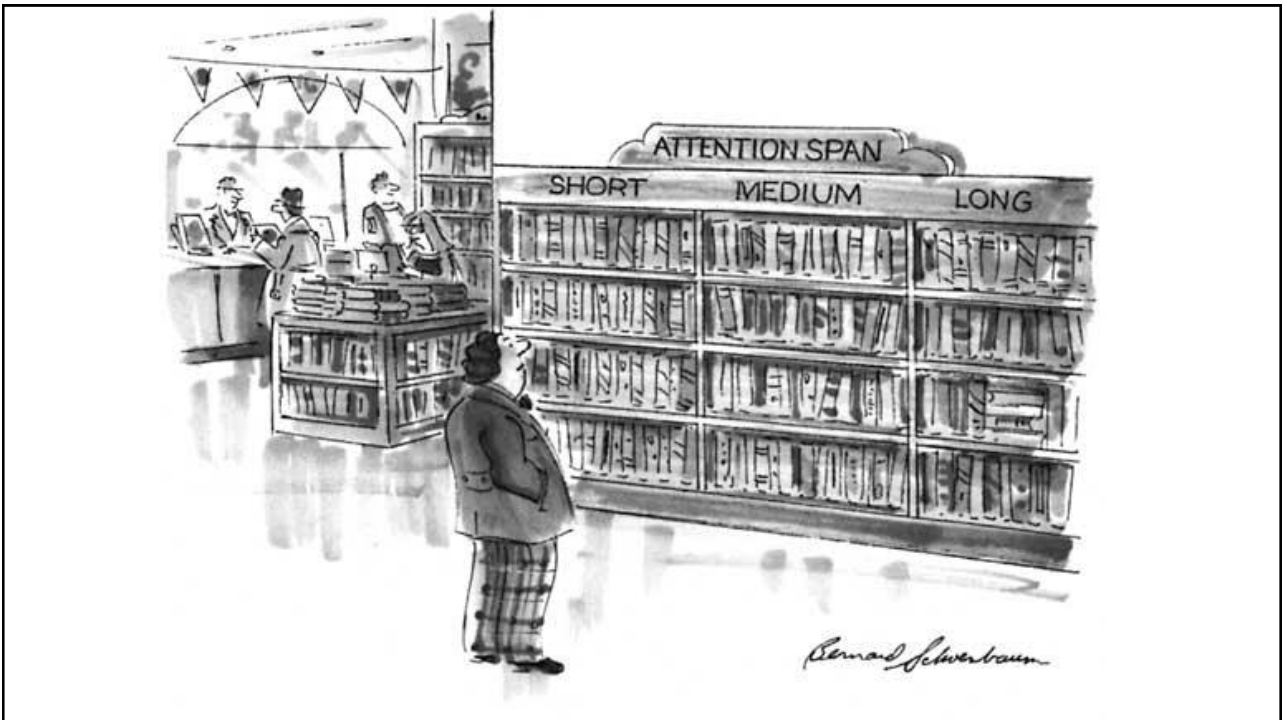Southwestern Pennsylvania Threat Hub

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Disclosures

- No payments or gifts from pharma, industry, or other ACCME-defined commercial interests
- We both receive funding from US DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships and Pennsylvania Commission on Crime & Delinquency

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Will more effective mental health screening and treatment reduce mass shootings?

(Enter a yes/no or very short answer in the comments)

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POLL Washington Post-ABC News Poll

Most say mental health efforts, stricter gun laws could have prevented mass shooting at Parkland, Fla., school

Q: You may have heard about the mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, Fla. Do you think this event could or could not have been prevented by...

More effective mental health screening and treatment

	COULD HAVE PREVENTED	COULD NOT HAVE PREVENTED
All	77%	16%
Democrats	78%	16%
Republicans	77%	17%
Independents	78%	17%
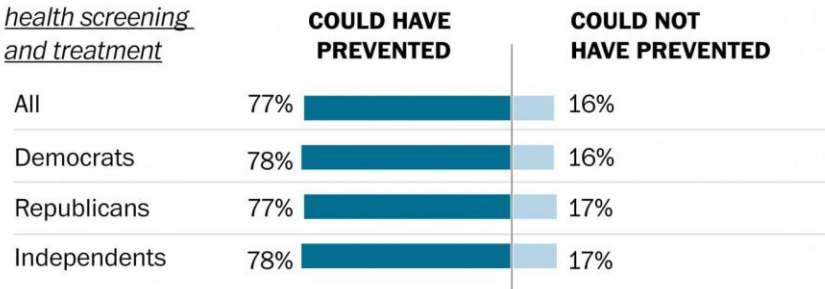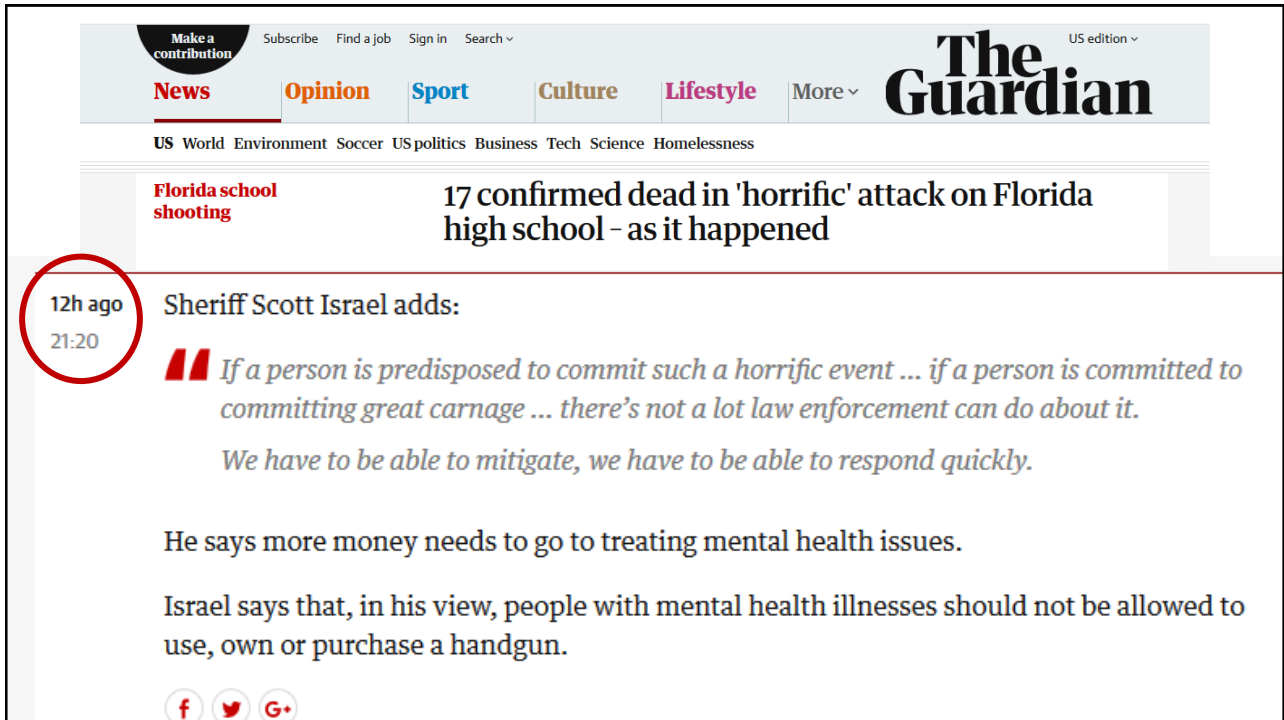
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MSD Highschool / Parkland, Florida (2/14/2018)

- 17 killed, 14 injured
- Longstanding fixation on weapons
- Posted "I'm going to be a professional school shooter"
- Known history of animal cruelty, threatening behavior, violence in romantic relationships
- Expelled for threatening behavior
- Many personal losses
- Hx of outpt MH tx ~1 year prior

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Potential risks of news coverage

- **Desensitizing** → is it still news when it happens every day?
- **Traumatizing** → impacting audience and reporter alike
- **Misleading** → inspires incorrect policy goals and perceptions of risk and safety
- **Educating** → Tactical mimicry
- **Glamorizing** → Temporal clustering, outscoring
- **Stigmatizing** → bias against people with mental illness

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Beware the shiny object
-Stephanie Leite, PsyD

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98.5% of firearm homicides of school age children and adolescents from 1994-2018 occurred outside of the school.

CDC MMWR 1/25/2019
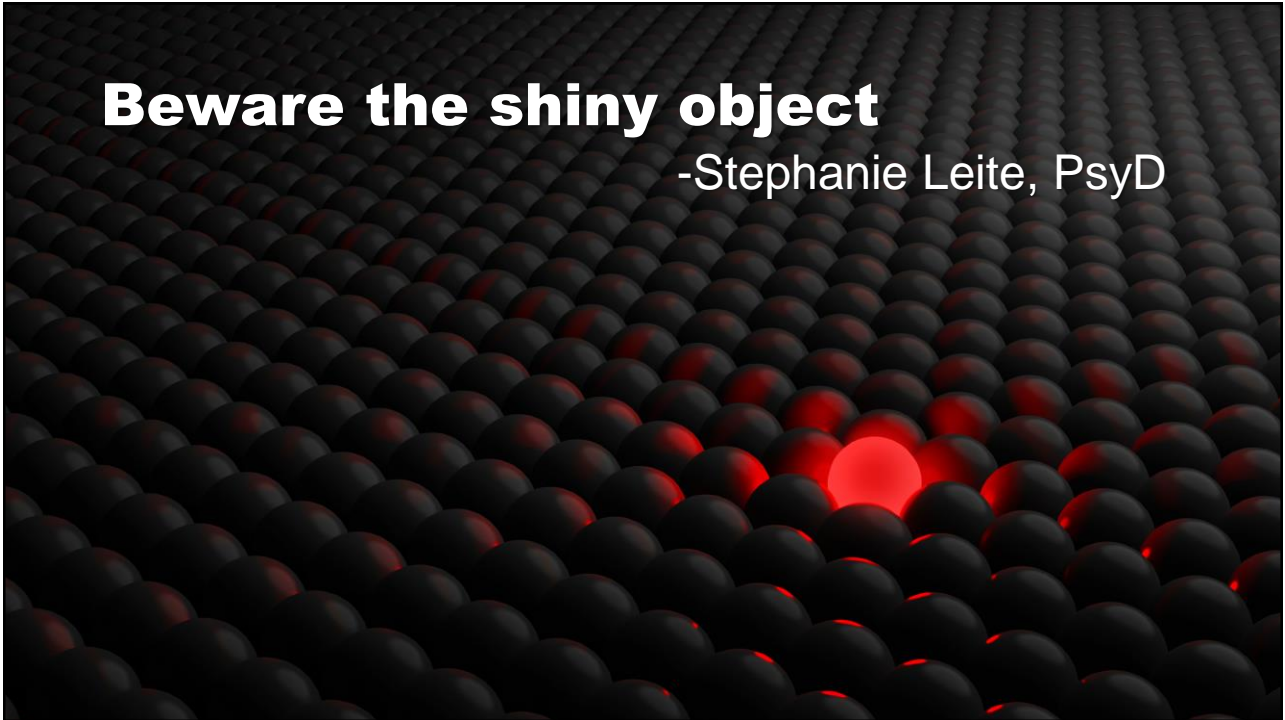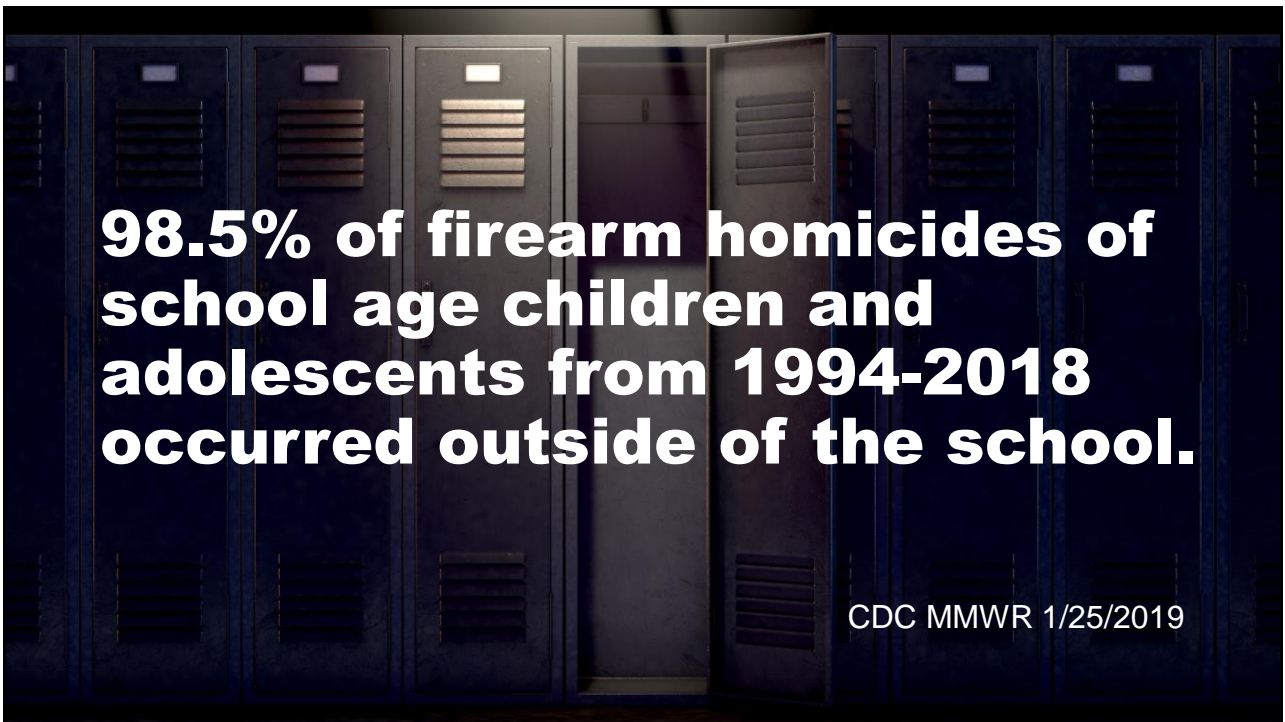
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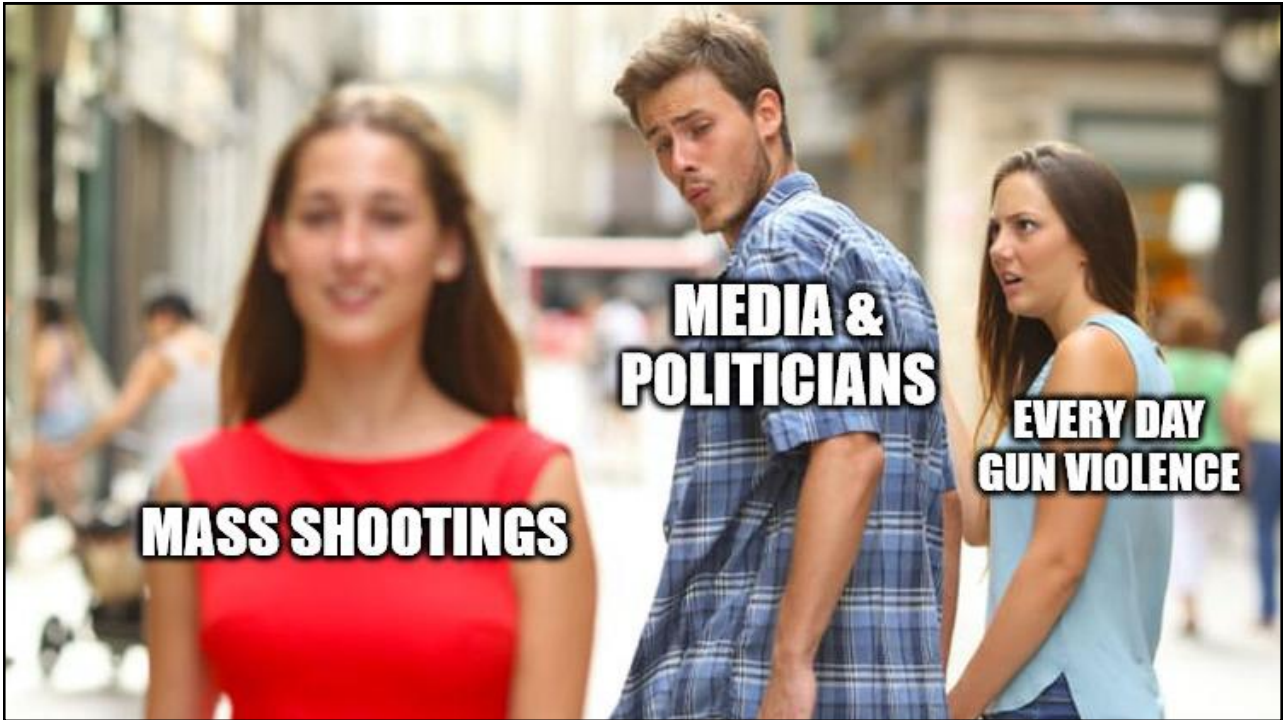
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Layers of Mental Illness

- Symptoms
- Diagnoses, current or past
- Current, significant impairment
- If I saw this person in the psychiatric emergency service, would I
  - Recommend outpatient, partial, inpatient?
  - Involuntary commitment?
- Would this person meet criteria for involuntary outpatient commitment? Long term state hospitalization?
- Not competent to stand trial?
- Guilty but mentally ill? (Illness impacts)
- Not guilty by reason of insanity? (Illness overrides)
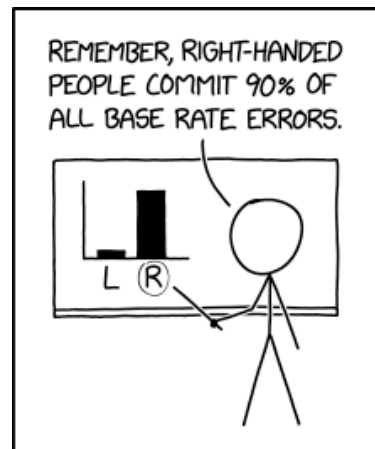
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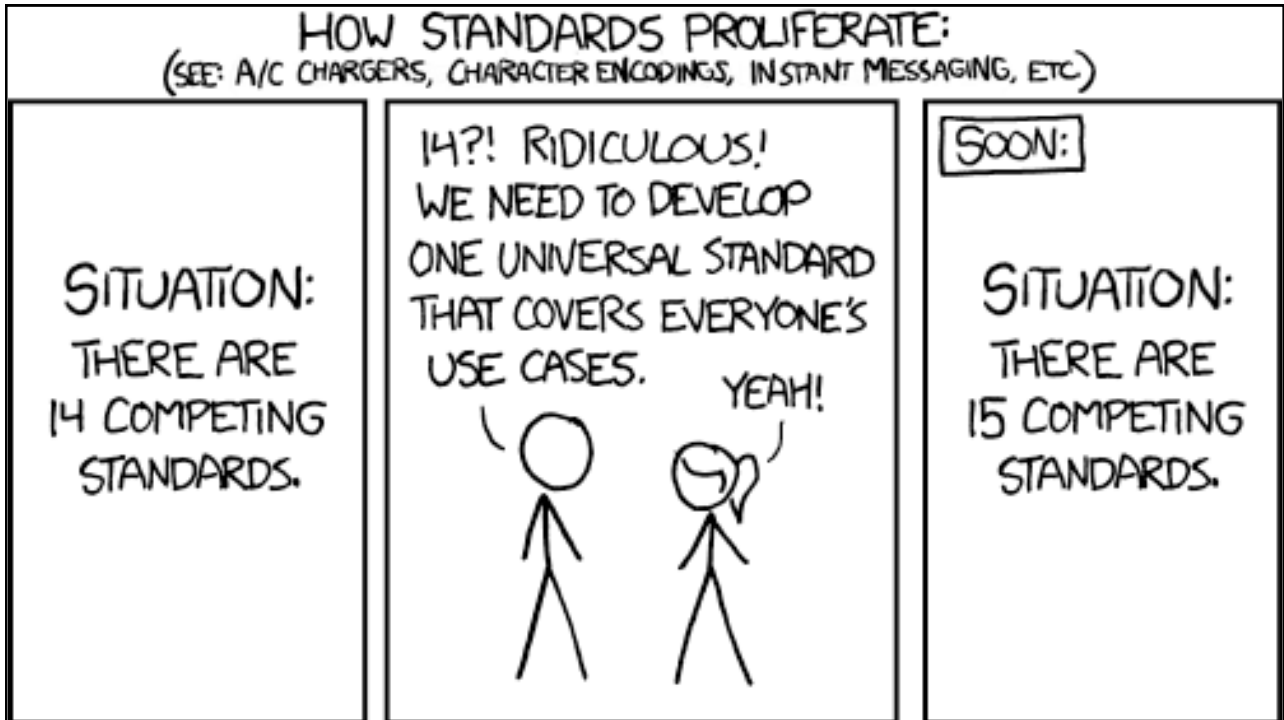
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Violence & Mass Shootings: Likelihood of "mental illness"

%	Description
4%	Violence attributable to mental illness (Swanson 1996)
17%	Any non-SUD Axis I in murder def's (Martone 2013)
4.7%	NICS-disqualifying mental illness PMSs (Silver et al 2018)
11%	Evidence of prior MH "concerns" (Everytown 2015)
17%	Pre-incident dx, school shooters (Vossekuil/SSI 2002)
25%	Evidence of SMI, 100+ yrs of MM (Stone 2015)
25%	Pre-incident diagnosis of any kind, AS (Silver/BAU 2018)
28%	Evidence of MI, ISIS-influenced (Gill & Corner 2017)
40%	Prior dx in targeted school attacks (USSS/NTAC 2019)
55%	Lifetime risk, DSM-IV Disorder, all of USA (Kessler 2006)
59%	"Signs of serious mental illness" (Duwe 2007)
62%	Mental Health "Stressor," AS (Silver/BAU 2018)
86%	Prevelance by age 45, any disorder, Dunedin (Caspi 2020)

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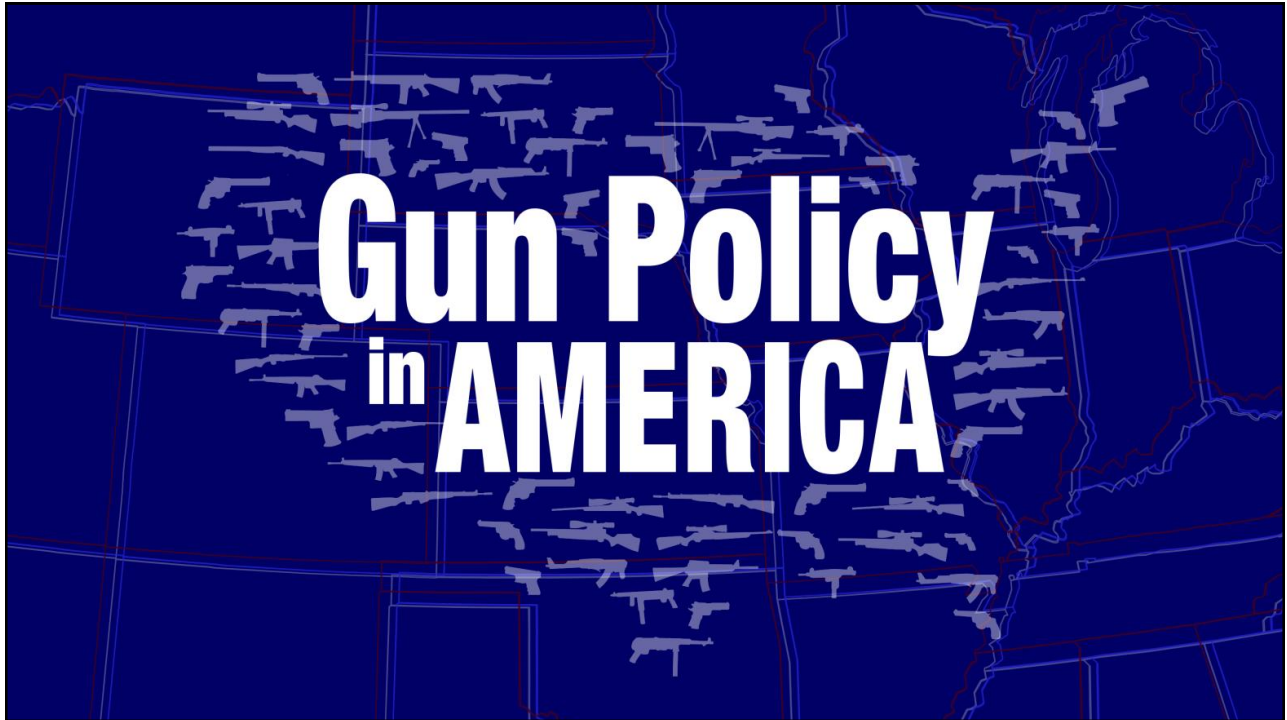
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Mass Shootings
(Science of Gun Policy, 2020 Update)

- What does the scientific evidence say about the effects of various firearm policies on societally important outcomes?

- 123 / 12,916 studies (Title/Abstract Review) included in full SR; only 8 applicable to mass shootings

- Inconclusive findings:
  - Background checks, ASW/HCM bans, license/permit requirements, child access laws, minimum purchase age, CC laws, waiting periods, SYG laws

- No studies met inclusion criteria:
  - Saturday Night Special Laws, ERPOs, Training requirements, Gun Free Zones, Armed Staff in Schools, IPV/MI prohibitions, lost/stolen reporting, surrender by prohibited possessors

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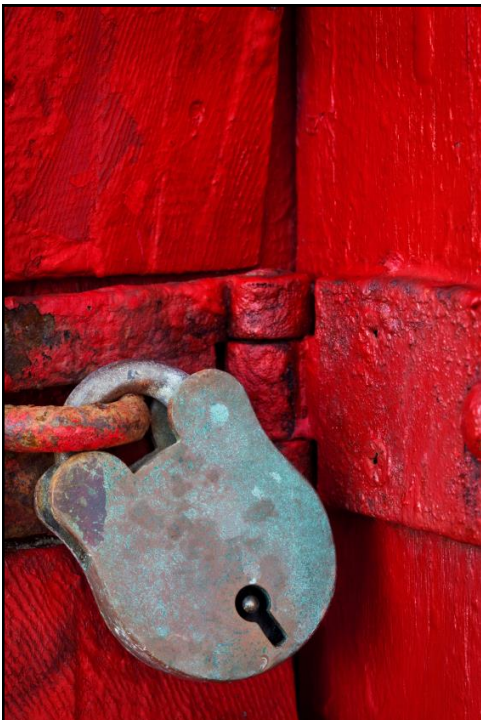
Good public health...

- Evidence based, not fear driven
- Costs proportional to benefits
- Infringement of liberties proportional to needs of the public
- Net positive impact on other risks
- Measurable interventions, measurable outcomes
- Effective across scale and category
- Not security theater

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Why we're here:

Because Threat Assessment, as a discipline, offers:

- An approach to assessing and managing situations that can lead to violence
- Prevention strategies that are evidence based and scale across risk categories
- Security, not security theater
- A chance to work left of bang

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A **multidisciplinary threat assessment team**, in conjunction with the appropriate policies, tools, and training, is the best practice for preventing future tragedies.

Protecting America's Schools
U.S. Secret Service, 2019

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Critical findings
(USSS/NTAC Protecting America's Schools 2019)

- **There is no profile of a student attacker, nor is there a profile for the type of school that has been targeted**
- Attackers usually had multiple motives, the most common involving a grievance with classmates
- Most attackers used firearms, and firearms were most often acquired from the home
- Most attackers had experienced psychological, behavioral, or developmental symptoms
- Half of the attackers had interests in violent topics

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Critical findings
(USSS/NTAC Protecting America's Schools 2019)

- All attackers experienced social stressors involving their relationships with peers and/or romantic partners
- Nearly every attacker experienced negative home life factors
- Most attackers were victims of bullying, which was often observed by others
- Most attackers had a history of school disciplinary actions, and many had prior contact with law enforcement
- **All attackers exhibited concerning behaviors. Most elicited concern from others, and most communicated their intent to attack**

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Prior Knowledge of Potential School Based Violence (Pollack/USSS & DOE, 2008)

- School climate matters. Schools cannot take for granted that students will come forward; however, **the appropriate school climate can encourage students to do so**
- Some bystanders voiced a genuine disbelief that the attack would occur and thus did not report it
- Students feared negative consequences if they were to report information
- Students often misjudged the immediacy and likelihood of the planned attack
- **Parents and adults within the school setting can play a key role in influencing their children's reporting behavior**

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NatCon & SCGV: School Recommendations

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NatCon Mass Violence Report: Modular Tool You Can Customize

- Executive Summary
- Environmental Scan – Causes and Impacts
- Potential Solutions
- Recommendations – specific and actionable
  - Schools
  - Federal and State Government
  - Psychiatrists and Allied Psychiatric Professions
  - Provider Organizations
  - Payers
  - Training Programs
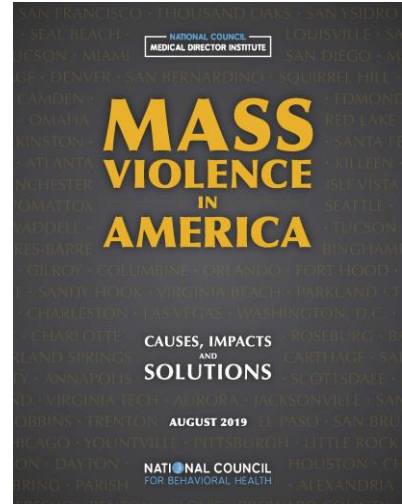
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Training is important prior to an event

- Training has not been a priority in teacher preparation coursework nor in professional development
- Prevention – not just intervention
- Often sought only in the aftermath of a highly publicized event
- Preparedness involves not just planning to respond, but also planning to recover

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One size does **not** fit all

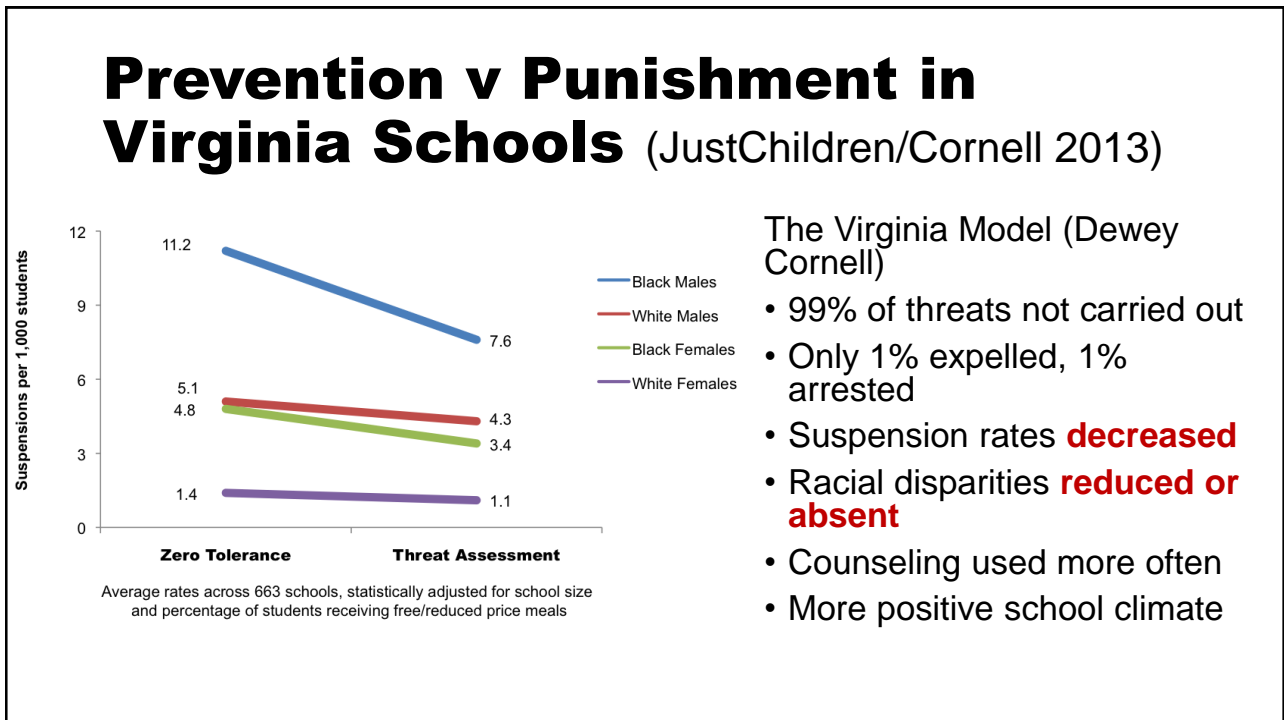

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Prevention v Punishment in Virginia Schools (JustChildren/Cornell 2013)

Average rates across 663 schools, statistically adjusted for school size and percentage of students receiving free/reduced price meals

The Virginia Model (Dewey Cornell)
- 99% of threats not carried out
- Only 1% expelled, 1% arrested
- Suspension rates **decreased**
- Racial disparities **reduced or absent**
- Counseling used more often
- More positive school climate

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Governor's Special Council on Gun Violence

- Threat management
- Primary prevention, mental health promotion, trauma informed systems
- Universal background checks
- Child access prevention laws / incentives
- Safer storage laws / incentives
- Lost / stolen gun reporting laws / incentives
- Exploration of ERPOs
- Improved, evidence-based education for owners, dealers, and health professionals

Special Council on Gun Violence
Report of Findings, Recommendations & Action Steps

March 2020
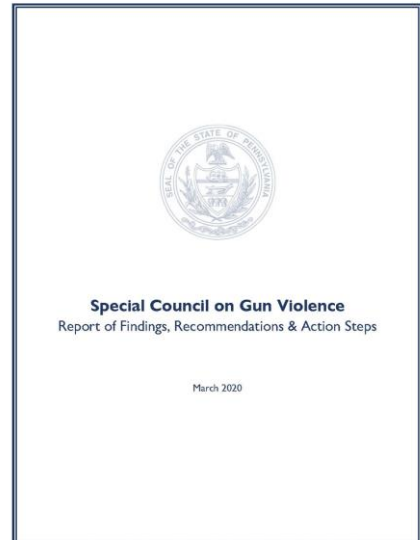
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Have you heard of Safe2Say?

(Enter a yes/no or very short answer in the comments)

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Safe2SayPA.org

- 24/7/365 centralized reporting system for Pennsylvania K12
- Anonymous reporting via Online, App, **844-SAF2SAY** (no 'e')
- Reviewed and routed as indicated to school administration and / or law enforcement
- "If it makes you uncomfortable, submit a tip"

Safe2Say

SAFE SAY
SOMETHING

Submit a Tip →
Call the Hotline →
What To Report →
Review / Update Existing Tip →

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Safe2Say: 2020-2021 Highlights

TIP TOTALS 07/01/2020 - 06/30/2021	
Event Types	**Total**
Bullying / Cyber Bullying	1459
Suicide / Suicide Ideation	1394
Cutting / Self-Harm	944
Drug Distribution / Possession	603
Depression / Anxiety	566
Smoking (Tobacco, E-Cig, Vape) in School	556
Hate Crime / Hate Speech / Discrimination	510
Inappropriate Language/Behavior/Gesture	419
Harassment / Intimidation	390
False Report / Prank Tip	378

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Upstanders, not bystanders

- Good data on bystander interventions for sexual assault, bullying
- Trust matters
- Diverse trusted leadership (a lock for every key)
- Heroes raise their hands – heroes help

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Threat Management Essentials

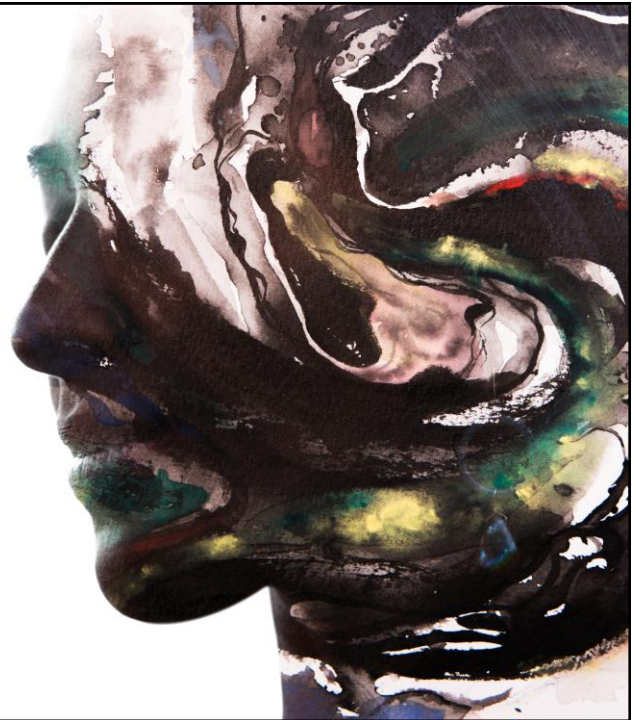38

Threat assessment and management

- Using diverse teams of subject matter and operational experts to recognize and manage violence risk before attacks happen
- Evidence based identification, investigation, prevention and follow up (case management*)
- May involve people with direct connection to person of concern (eg, family, teacher, clergy)
- Focus is on behavior, communication, risk factors; not profiling by diagnosis, religion, ethnicity, etc.
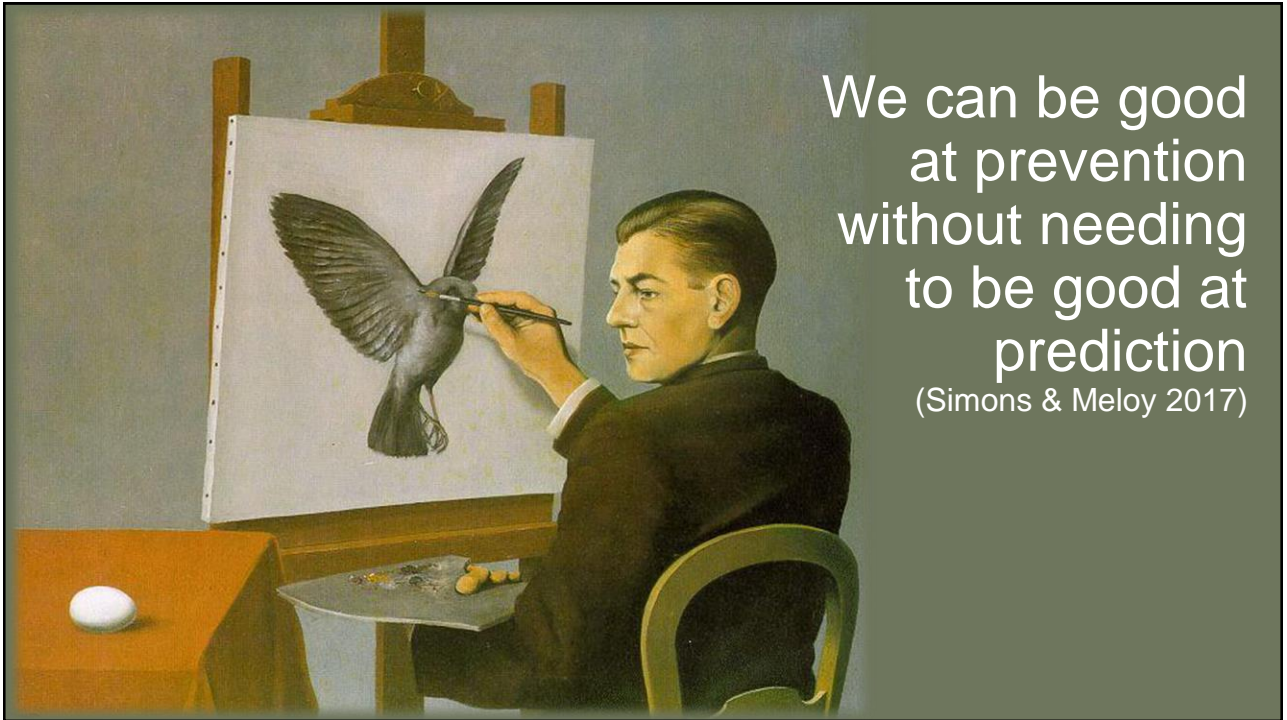- Mitigation of harm is the absolute goal

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Behavior.
Communication.
Ideation.

Not profiling.
Not profiling.
Not profiling.
Not profiling.

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We can be good at prevention without needing to be good at prediction
(Simons & Meloy 2017)

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You have to collect the dots before you can connect the dots

42

How can I help?

- An illness that can be treated
- A legitimate grievance that can be addressed
- An error that can be apologized for
- A psychosocial stressor that I can mitigate
- A strength I can amplify
- A protective factor I can add or reinforce
- Soft landings & supported exits
- Promote connection

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How can I hurt?

- Acting out of bias
- Ignore concerns – ignore the dots
- Blame / punish reporters
- Punish / Push away
- Zero tolerance
- Scare / alienate
- Hard landings / fast exits

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Engaging, not interrogating

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Path to Intended* Violence
(Adapted from Calhoun & Weston 2003/2016)

Attack

Breach

Preparation

Research

Ideation

Grievance

→ Dynamic Risk Factors →
← Dynamic Protective Factors ←

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Targeted Violence Concepts: Hostile Attribution Model

- Youth and adults prone toward violence are more likely to interpret ambiguous actions as hostile and threatening than are their less aggressive counterparts
- Exists on a continuum – Cognitive distortions strong or weak
- Define social problems in hostile ways, adopt hostile goals, seek few additional facts, generate few alternatives, identify few consequences
- Hostile aggression – negative views of self, world, people
- Hypervigilant towards hostility

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Aggression in Females

- An ongoing association with delinquent peers appears to be an important factor in the onset of delinquency among adolescent girls (Mullis et al. 2004).
- 92% of female juvenile offenders have been subject to some form of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (Acoca & Dedel, 1998).
- In recent years, violence among young females has increased in terms of both the number of offenses committed and the severity of these offenses (Cauffman et al., 2007).
- Girls tend to follow the same developmental pathways toward antisocial behavior and delinquency as boys (Odgers et al. 2008)
- Girls may be more likely to be pulled into delinquency through involvement in intimate relationships with delinquent males rather than through involvement with delinquent gangs (Mullis et al. 2004).

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"We stabbed her."

Rachel Shoaf, January 3, 2013

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Arousal, Control, & Frustration

- Prosocial solutions more complex than aggressive solutions

- High levels of arousal, diminished social competence / social skills, cognitive limitations interfere with the ability to find a prosocial solution
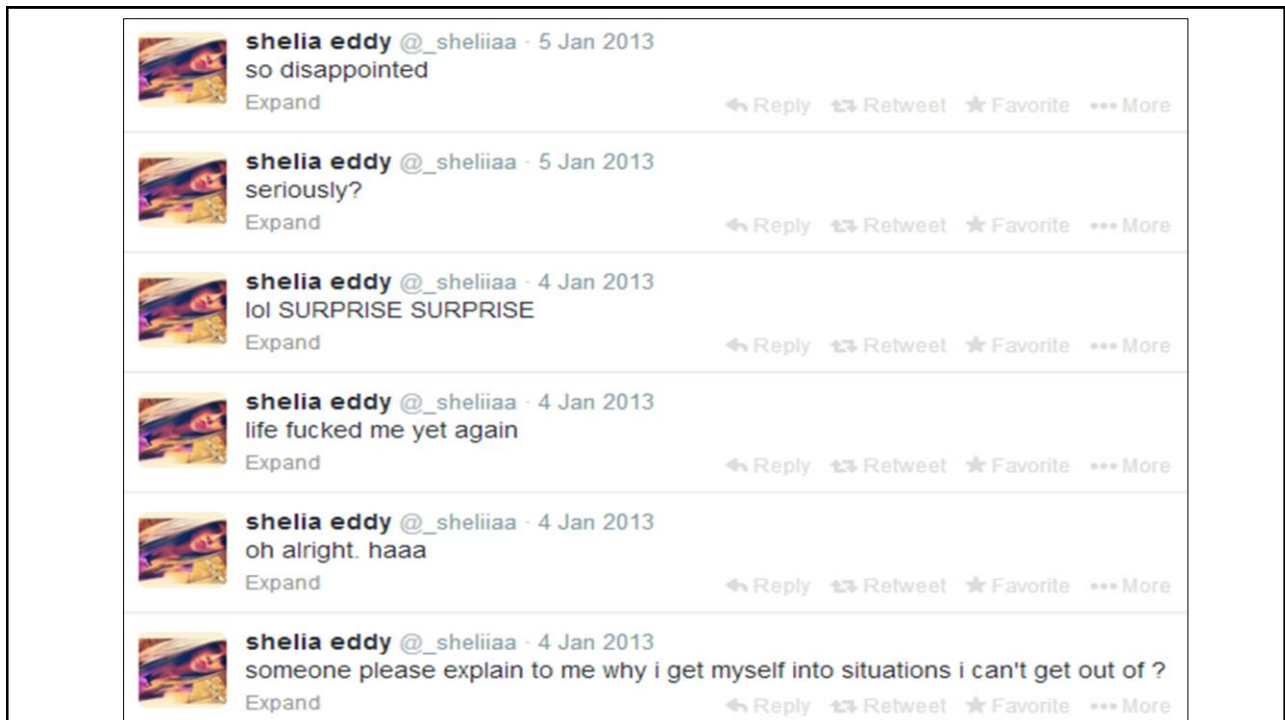
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As many as 80% of assailants leak or threaten (Lankford et al 2019, Mitchell 2019 et al, Meloy & O'Toole 2011)

A **threat** is a communication to a target of intent to do harm.

Leakage is the communication to a third party of an intent to do harm.

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shelia eddy @_sheliiaa · 5 Jan 2013
so disappointed
Expand   ↩ Reply ⇄ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

shelia eddy @_sheliiaa · 5 Jan 2013
seriously?
Expand   ↩ Reply ⇄ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

shelia eddy @_sheliiaa · 4 Jan 2013
lol SURPRISE SURPRISE
Expand   ↩ Reply ⇄ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

shelia eddy @_sheliiaa · 4 Jan 2013
life fucked me yet again
Expand   ↩ Reply ⇄ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

shelia eddy @_sheliiaa · 4 Jan 2013
oh alright. haaa
Expand   ↩ Reply ⇄ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

shelia eddy @_sheliiaa · 4 Jan 2013
someone please explain to me why i get myself into situations i can't get out of ?
Expand   ↩ Reply ⇄ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

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General Aggression Model

- The predatory individual perceives and interprets the social environment and forms Expectations
- Incorporates biological, personality development, social processes, basic cognitive process and decision process.
- Judgments and process become automatized over time.
- Violence occurs with an escalation cycle (real or perceived – a triggering event). The event can be influenced by a dyad – and then consider retaliation.
- Retaliation Cycle (caused by attribution error)
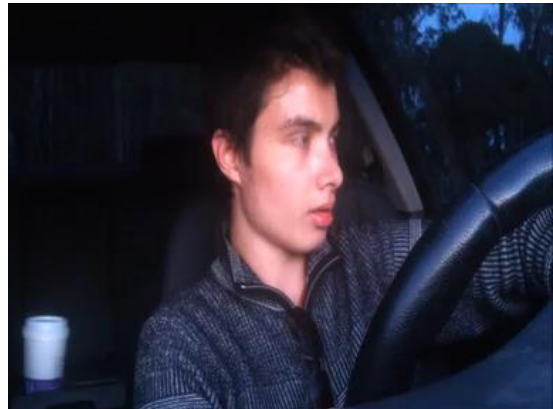
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You have to collect the dots
before you can connect the dots
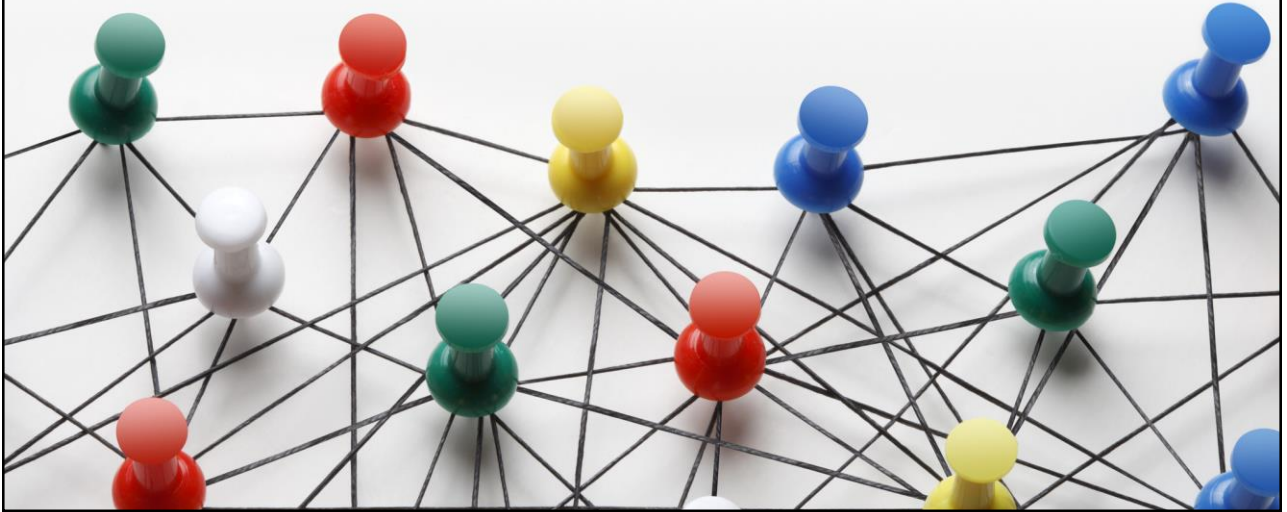
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Rapport
Based
Interviewing

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Interview Techniques

- PEACE Model – Plan, Engage, Explain, Account, Clarify, Challenge, Closure, Evaluation
- Observing Rapport Based Interview Model - Acceptance, Empathy, Adaptation, Evocation, Autonomy (Alison & Alison, 2017)
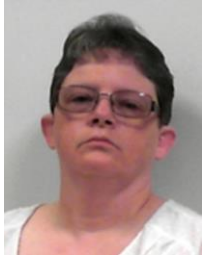- Psychologically Based Credibility Assessment examines spatial detail with demeanor (Evans et al., 2013). Emphasizes the presentation of auditory details, spatial details, and temporal details (affective, comprehension)

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Emerging Interviewing Techniques: PEACE

- Presentation and planning
- Engage and explain
- Account
- Clarify, challenge, and closure

- Principle 1: The interviewee is always invited to tell their story, which helps to preserve their autonomy and dignity.
- Principle 2: Circle back to topics covered that were not raised by the interviewee. Use OEQs to address.
- Principle 3:Questions are designed to clarify or subtly challenge. Develop discrepancy.
- Consider mimicry: Mimicking a conversation partner builds rapport. Mirror nonverbal, speech rate, linguistic patterns, posture, mannerisms.

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Emerging Interviewing Techniques: Cognitive Interviewing Technique

- Cognitive Interviewing uses memory, social dynamics and perspective
- Cognitive Load vs limited Cognitive Flexibility (Vrij, 2014).

- Stage 1: Imposing Cognitive Load
  - Reverse Order, Secondary Tasking, Forced Turn Telling
- Stage 2: Encouraging Interviewee to Say More
  - Model Statement (expectations), Supportive Interviewer, Mimicry, Drawings, no detail too small
- Stage 3: Asking Open-Ended Questions
  - Spatial Questions, Process vs. Outcome, Ask Question Twice in Different Formats

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Principles of Interviewing: Observe, Listen, and Project

- Active Listening to de-escalate
- Open-ended Questions
- Subtly reframe negative thoughts with alternatives
- Become an ally
- Identify Dichotomous Thinking
- Instill Hope
- Subtly suggest alternatives to constricted thinking
- Watch your body language, watch your nonverbal
- Help to identify Black and White thinking
- Allow subject to speak freely to obtain information
- Be on guard for "Duping Delight"

- Employ humor when appropriate
- Be straightforward and avoid air of superiority
- If subject makes even a minimal disclosure, compliment them
- Establish a "this for that" barter when negotiating information
- Probe if his current methods have gotten him success
- Motivational Interviewing
- Verifiability Interview
- Understand elements of rationalization, projection, minimization
- Allow to speak so to identify areas of possible deception

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Thank you!

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