

Recognizing Early Warning Signs & Risk Factors

Purpose:

This handout provides a structured guide for identifying early warning signs and risk factors in students who may be at risk for behavioral escalation, school violence, or self-harm. Recognizing these indicators early allows for proactive intervention and support.

1. Behavioral Warning Signs

- Sudden changes in mood, behavior, or personality
 - Increased aggression, hostility, or defiance
 - Withdrawal from friends, family, or school activities
 - Expressing hopelessness, sadness, or extreme frustration
 - Obsessive interest in violence, weapons, or prior school attacks
 - Engaging in bullying behavior (as a perpetrator or victim)
 - Increased disciplinary issues, suspensions, or detentions
 - Verbal or written expressions of threats or violent intentions
 - Self-harm behaviors or preoccupation with death
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2. Academic & School Engagement Risk Factors

- Sudden drop in academic performance or attendance
 - Loss of interest in schoolwork, extracurricular activities, or future goals
 - Repeated conflicts with teachers or authority figures
 - Frequently skipping classes or arriving late
 - Declining motivation, effort, or participation in school activities
 - Previous school suspensions or expulsions
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3. Social & Environmental Risk Factors

- Lack of peer connections or social isolation
- Experience of bullying, harassment, or discrimination
- History of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Dysfunctional or unstable home environment
- Family history of violence, substance abuse, or criminal activity

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- Exposure to domestic violence or high-conflict parental relationships
 - Homelessness or financial instability
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4. Mental Health & Psychological Indicators

- Diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety, PTSD)
 - Expressions of paranoia, extreme distrust, or persecutory thoughts
 - Substance abuse or addiction concerns
 - Sudden changes in sleeping or eating habits
 - Frequent outbursts of anger, frustration, or crying
 - History of suicide attempts or suicidal ideation
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5. Threat-Related Indicators

- Making direct or veiled threats toward individuals or the school
 - Fascination with or access to weapons
 - Leakage of violent intentions through social media, writings, or conversations
 - Researching or glorifying mass violence incidents
 - Expressing a sense of grievance or revenge against specific individuals or groups
 - Sudden, unexplained acquisition of firearms or other dangerous items
 - Communicating a desire to harm others or oneself
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6. Steps for Early Intervention

- Take all warning signs seriously—small concerns can escalate.
 - Document observed behaviors and patterns over time.
 - Report concerns to the Behavioral Threat Assessment Team (BTAT).
 - Engage the student in a supportive conversation; listen actively.
 - Work with counselors, mental health professionals, and law enforcement when necessary.
 - Implement appropriate intervention strategies, including mentoring, counseling, or safety planning.
 - Follow up regularly to assess changes in behavior and risk level.
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Final Reminder:

Early identification and intervention can **prevent crises and ensure school safety**. If you recognize multiple warning signs, **act immediately** by reporting concerns to the appropriate school personnel or crisis response team.