

## WS1: Threat Assessment Overview

*Note:* This is overview information about the threat assessment process and is not intended to take the place of more thorough training in this process.

### Principles of Threat Assessment

Targeted violence is not random or spontaneous. It results from an understandable process. When school professionals respond to a potential threat, there are specific principles to consider to ensure a thorough and nonbiased assessment based upon facts and behaviors.

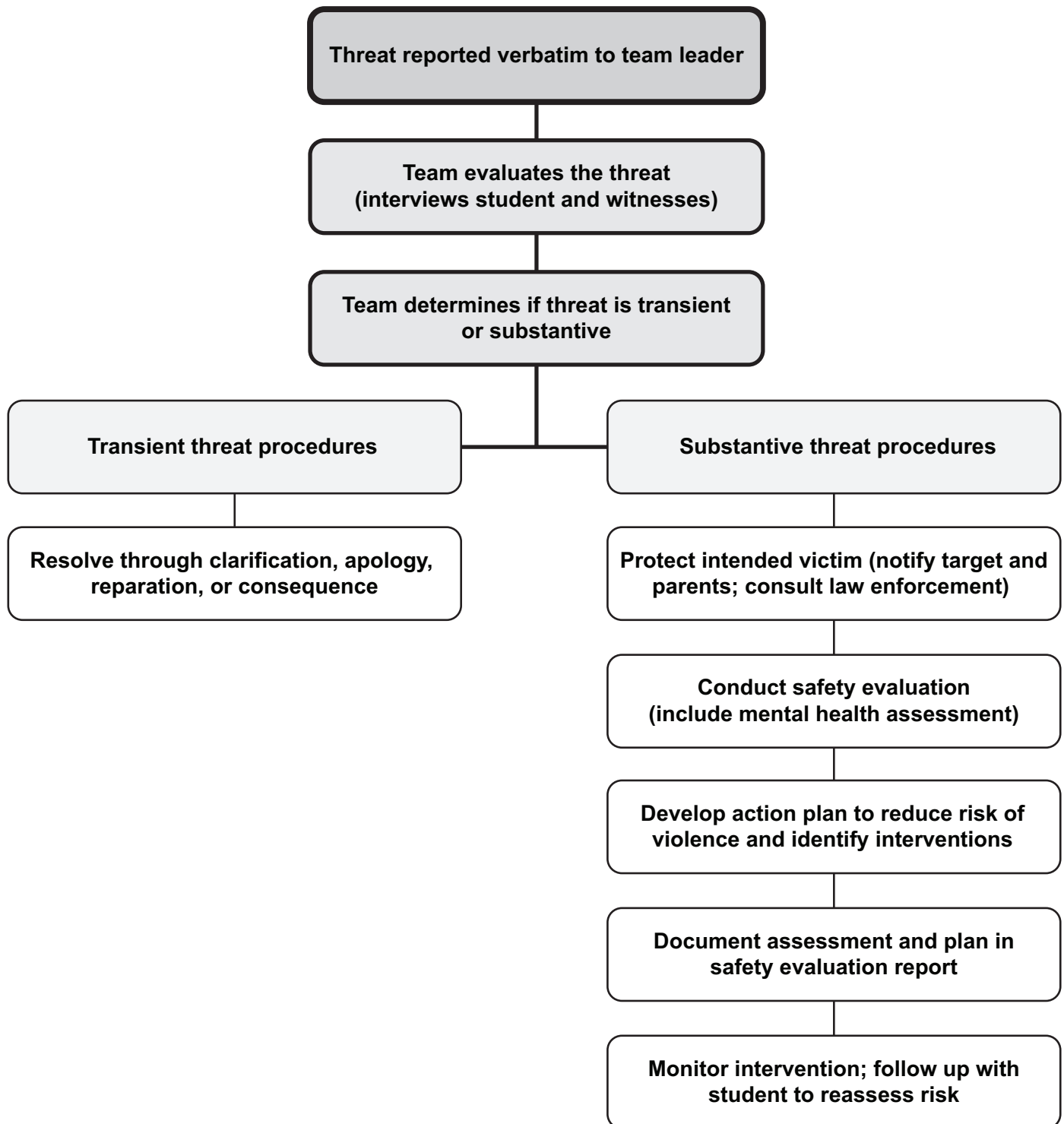
#### When conducting an assessment:

- Consider the individual who made the threat, the situation, the setting, and the individual who is the target.
- Keep an investigative, skeptical mind-set.
- Focus on facts and behaviors, not personality traits.
- Use information from multiple sources.
- Consider the extent to which the individual poses a threat by asking, “Is this student on a path to following through with an attack?”

### Key Questions to Ask Regarding the Student Making the Threat

- What are the student’s motives or goals?
- Have there been any communications of the intent to attack?
- Does the student have inappropriate interest in weapons, violence, or other attacks?
- Has the student exhibited attack-related behaviors, such as devising a plan, obtaining weapons, or casing sites?
- Does the student have the capacity (time, ability, desire, or opportunity) to carry out the attack?
- Is there evidence of hopelessness or despair?
- Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one adult?
- Is violence perceived as a way to solve a problem? What are the peer influences?
- Are the student’s words consistent with his or her actions?
- Are others concerned about this student?
- What circumstances might trigger violence in this student?

**Figure 1. Steps in the Threat Assessment Process**



Note. Adapted from *Essential Core Knowledge Regarding Threat Assessment and Threat Management in the Schools*, by D. Cornell et al., 2005, Bethesda, MD: NASP. Copyright 2005 by the National Association of School Psychologists. Adapted with permission of the authors. See also *Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence*, by D. Cornell & P. Sheras, 2006, Longmont, CO: Sopris West.