

Madison Metropolitan School District

Violence Risk Assessment: Orientation and Process

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What is a Violence Risk Assessment?

- Set of procedure and tools to use when a student may pose a risk to the safety of others that suggests need for immediate action.
 - Aggression toward others
 - Threats of aggression or harm to others
 - Intimidation of others
 - A pattern of behavior that raises suspicion of risk for violence. (violent stories, drawings, or Internet communications)

Purpose of the VRA

- To determine the risk of harm posed by the student—high, moderate, low
- To maintain a safe school environment
- To develop a relationship with the student who is suspected of being at risk for school violence
- To guide the development of appropriate interventions for the student

Why use VRA?

- Provides organization for thinking and decision making
- Keeps focus on risk
- Spreads the responsibility
- Provides structure
- Emphasizes:
 - The serious nature
 - The school's safety
 - The needs of the student

And if that's not enough . . .

- The decisions required are “high stakes.”
- Responsibility for safety of the students and staff can be balanced with the rights of the student.
- Clinical, “gut” judgment is not a good predictor of risk.
- Often we see a complex picture, with many factors that may impact risk.
- The VRA process allows decisions to be based upon empirical data.

Preparation

- Develop a written district procedure
- Important components
 - Risk assessment process
 - Team decision making
 - Parent involvement
 - Consider legal issues/liability/student rights
 - Outcome that includes safety and intervention
- Staff training

Prevention

- Develop a climate of belonging and affirmation of diversity.
- Build trust between students and staff.
- Reach out to troubled students
- Address bullying and harassment.
- Educate staff about to report concerns.



Decision Making

- School principal (with input from staff) determines when it is necessary to implement the VRA.
- Use “red flag” factors to judge need.
- Weigh safety and liability factors.
- A VRA does not require suspendable behavior.
- Consult others if unsure.
 - District Safety Coordinator
 - Pupil Services Director

Red Flags

- Specificity of plan
- “Leakage” or spill-over
- History of violent behaviors
- Impulsivity
- Access
 - Weapons in home
 - Weapons in neighborhood
- Poor reality testing/judgment
- Anger and antisocial patterns



MMSD VRA Tools

- Procedure Flow Chart
- VRA Risk Factors Checklist
- Mental Health Risk Factors Checklist
- MH Risk Factors Guide
- Mental Health Interview Guide
- Team Planning Document
- Summary Report Template

Steps in Completing a VRA

1. Principal (or designee) notifies Safety Coordinator, contacts parent(s), and assigns tasks.
2. Principal or designee completes Risk Factors Checklist and indicates areas where data needs to be gathered.
3. Pupil Services staff gather information from various sources and conduct a student interview using the Student Interview Guide and MHI Checklist to organize risk factors.

VRA Steps, continued.

4. Team Decision Making

1. Look at data to assess the level of risk.
2. Develop a safety plan.
3. Develop an intervention & support plan.

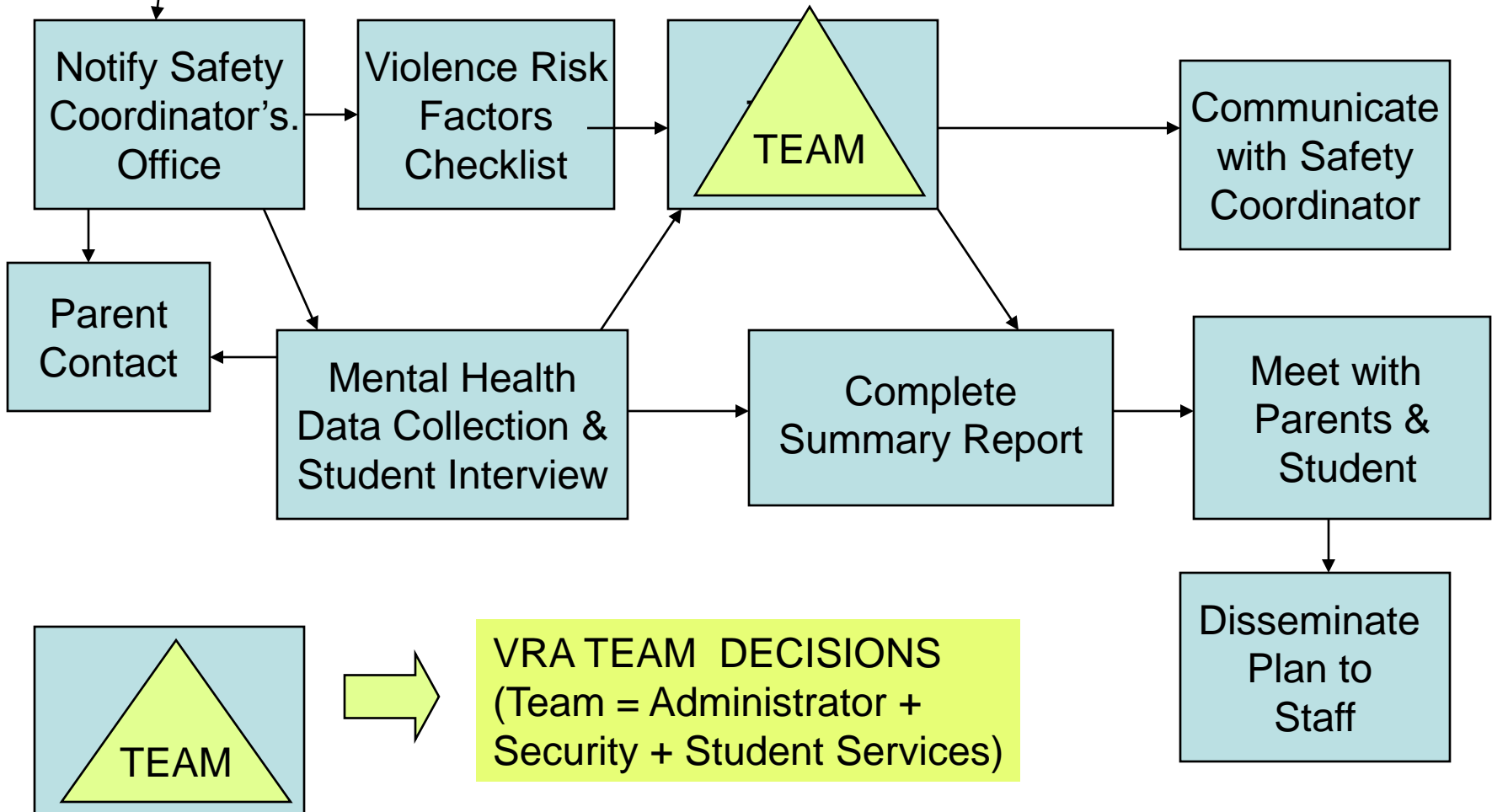
5. Summary Report & Dissemination of Information

1. Write a Summary Report using the Report Template.
2. Meet with parents and student about results safety plans and recommended interventions.
3. Communicate to appropriate staff (“need to know” guidelines).

VRA Flow Chart

Incident

Or other information



Parental Consent

- Parental consent is not required to interview student when factors indicate potential risk of harm to others.
- Informing the parent, gaining their assent and working collaboratively is best practice, but not legally required in situations involving risk of harm to others.
- Principal has more flexibility in interviewing students without parent permission.
- Parent may choose not to make the student available.
- Document and base risk assessment on available data.

Student Rights

- The student's right to confidentiality is waived when there is risk of harm to self or others.
- Explain the limits of confidentiality to the student and how this assessment interview is different than counseling.
- The boundaries of confidentiality may be discussed and negotiated with the student.
- The VRA report will not include details but parents and school staff will see the report.
- A student may choose not to take part in the interview, or not to answer specific questions.

Informed Consent

- Orient the student to the situation
 - Reason for the contact (review incident briefly)
 - Purpose of the interview
 - Decide how serious this behavior (threat) is
 - Assure the safety of others
 - Decide what might be helpful for the student
 - Expected outcome of the interview
 - Limits of confidentiality
- Get student assent to participate.
- If no assent, inform of outcome.

Use Your VRA Team

- Reduces risk of error.
- Avoids decision making responsibility falling to one person.
- Data is analyzed and interventions formulated using multiple lenses.
 - Mental health
 - Law enforcement
 - Educational
 - School Safety
 - County Social Services



Documentation

- A written Summary Report is completed that incorporates the relevant information.
- The Violence Risk Factors Checklist may be attached to the report.
- The report is written with parents, teachers and agency readers in mind.
- Report is stored in the Behavioral File.
- Personal notes (from interviews, record reviews and other sources) are not shared with others and kept in the personal file of the individual who produced them.

Summary Report Contents

- Identifying information
- Reason for referral
- Methods used in the assessment
- History and records review
- Summary of risk and protective factors.
- Estimate of risk level and rationale
- Recommendations
 - Safety of others
 - Interventions for student

Possible Outcomes of the VRA

When serious risk cannot be ruled out, steps to protect the safety of the school through a safety plan must be taken.

- Alternative transportation is arranged
- School start and end times are modified
- Academic schedule changed or reduced
- Schedule changes to avoid contact with target
- Increased student supervision in school
- Instruction delivered in another location
- Scheduled meetings between SS staff and student
- Student, backpack and/or locker searches
- Use of wands
- Seeking additional resources
- Off campus programming*
- Community-based resources are utilized*

Additional Resources

- You may need to request additional resources to manage risk...
 - Off campus programming.
 - Additional staff resources.
 - Removal from school.
- A Summary Report of VRA findings and recommendations can help document the need for resources.



What About Safety Issues

- Student interviews often take place in the Student Services staff office.
- If safety is a concern there are options:
 - Someone accessible outside the office door
 - Parent waiting nearby
 - Second adult sitting in on the interview
 - More public community location
- If concerns are great, a community based violence risk assessment may be possible.
- Reschedule the interview if the student is disoriented, out of control or highly agitated.

Notification of Targets

- Notification is required to individuals who may be at risk of harm.
- Student rights to confidentiality change.
- A collaborative team decision should be made regarding risk of harm.
 - Educators have higher standard than MH providers to protect the safety of students. (risk of danger does not have to be imminent)
 - Pros and cons of informing, how broadly to inform, what information to convey
 - Consult with Legal Counsel if unsure

Liability

- School personnel have a responsibility to take action for the safety of students.
- Being aware of a risk of harm and **DOING NOTHING** is a liability risk.
- Follow predetermined district procedures & best practice.
 - Review records thoroughly
 - Collect information following VRA guidelines
 - Use a team decision making model
 - Warn others who may be at risk for harm
 - Document the work, recommendations and rationale.

REMEMBER: Multiple sources of information . . .

. . .assessed from multiple perspectives,

. . .and team decisions.

