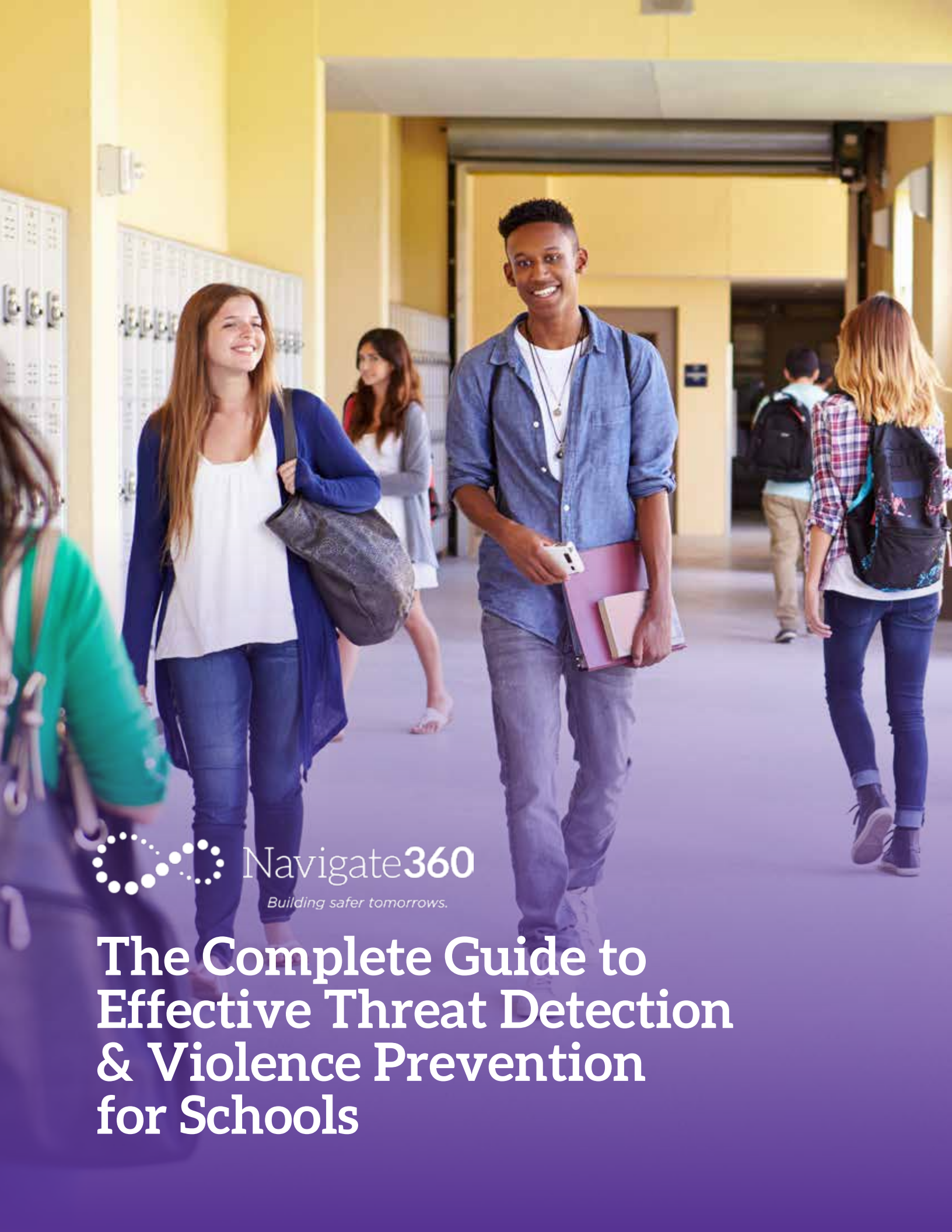

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Building safer tomorrows.

The Complete Guide to Effective Threat Detection & Violence Prevention for Schools

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Introduction

Uncertainty, isolation and a variety of additional social stressors are resulting in increased depression and anxiety for the students in your care. Furthermore, disrupted learning is disconnecting your community now more than ever before. Left unchecked, this disconnection can pose serious risks for your schools, weakening confidence and exacerbating safety vulnerabilities within your learning environments.

What can you do to ensure students and staff are safe and able to thrive? In this guide, we will discuss the value of threat detection and violence prevention programs, including what to consider before building such a program.

We will also outline the steps involved in implementing a threat detection and violence prevention program and provide additional expert resources to ensure your programs are as impactful as they can be.

The Importance of Threat Detection & Prevention for Schools

WHAT IS THREAT DETECTION AND WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL TO BUILDING A CULTURE OF SAFETY FOR YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT?

Threat detection and violence prevention encompass a broad range of concepts that require thoughtful definition. For the purposes of this guide, threats are defined as any harmful intention or behavior communicated by an individual or identified by a peer. Harm could be to self or others and include physical (violence, substance abuse/drug use, etc.), verbal (in-person, written or online), or emotional abuse.

As you will learn, comprehensive threat detection and prevention programs build a strong culture of safety by:

- **Establishing** and **communicating** standards for threatening behaviors;
- **Providing** safe ways for individuals to report concerns;
- **Creating** dedicated threat assessment teams to manage cases; and
- **Reinforcing** the value of physical, social and emotional safety for your staff, students and caregivers.

MORE THAN 3,000
threats were made against K-12 schools in the 2018-19 school year.

OVER 3,700
suicide attempts occur each day among kids in grades 9-12.

4 OUT OF 5
students who have attempted suicide showed obvious signs.

Sources: www.cafb.org/therapists-corner-suicide-prevention-and-youth

WHAT DOES A COMPREHENSIVE THREAT DETECTION & VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

Throughout this guide, we will explore the components of a successful threat detection and prevention program. At a minimum, your program should include the following:

- **Dedicated and diverse** team of experts
- **Clear school policies** and procedures that are available to everyone
- **Mechanisms and training** to report and identify threats or concerning behaviors
- **Threat management and tools** that are adaptable to both in-person and remote learning environments
- **Education and tools** to steer students onto a safer path

Free Threat Assessment Starter Kit

In addition to this guide, we encourage you to use this free Threat Assessment Starter Kit to begin building your program.

Get Your Starter Kit Now

Assemble a Diverse Team of Dedicated Experts

Threats and concerning behaviors take many different forms. A diverse threat detection and assessment team allows you to evaluate threats from multiple viewpoints, mitigating bias and ensuring concerns are managed mindfully.

Your threat assessment team is the foundation for your violence prevention program and should include, at a minimum, the following:

- **School resource officers or local law enforcement**
- **School psychologists/counselors/mental health professionals**
- **Emergency or safety managers**
- **School administrators, including principals**

DEFINING THREATS OR CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

The year 2020 has shown us that threats can come in many different forms, and they require thoughtful definition for effective identification. Use your team of experts to define threatening behavior and establish processes for reporting such behavior. Use plain language to outline your team's path for intervention and resolution.

While definitions are an important part of the process, your team must also understand that there is NO profile for a student who causes harm. The use of profiling is counterintuitive to the threat detection and assessment process, and it increases the likelihood of misidentifying those students who pose a risk.

TRANSIENT VERSUS SUBSTANTIVE THREATS

Transient threats are expressions of anger that can be resolved easily. Substantive threats indicate that someone has expressed intent to do harm, often with plans to do so.

Source: www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/threat-assessment-at-school

DETERMINE YOUR TEAM'S THREAT ASSESSMENT MODEL

As important as threat definitions are, your method for evaluating, managing and resolving threats is just as important.

Current threat assessment models include the following:

- National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC)
- Comprehensive Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG)
- Salem-Keizer Threat Assessment System

Review state and federal policies to determine whether compliance requirements exist for your district. Additionally, your team and district should consider the threat definitions you have agreed upon, as well as current societal issues that may play a role in student outcomes.

Research indicates threat assessment programs help schools provide students with appropriate resources and decrease long-term suspension rates.

PUBLICIZE YOUR DEFINITIONS AND MAKE POLICIES AVAILABLE TO STAFF, STUDENTS AND GUARDIANS

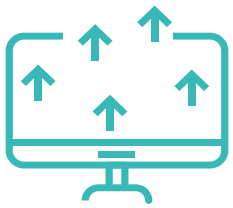
Once you have defined what a threat is and the procedures required for successful threat management, your team should work with your district to validate, solidify and publish policy updates.

Work with your threat assessment team to publicize policies that communicate the following:

- **Why the policy updates were made**
- **Who crafted the policies and who to contact with questions**
- **Where and how stakeholders can access the policies**
- **How the new policies will impact existing procedures**

The announcement policy updates provide your district with more transparency and shows your community that school safety is a priority.

3 STRATEGIES TO UPDATE & COMMUNICATE NEW SCHOOL THREAT & VIOLENCE PREVENTION POLICIES



1. Create digital versions of your policies for easier access. These are living documents that will require frequent updates to remain relevant. The impact of COVID-19 on schools serves as a perfect example as to why this is so necessary.

2. Use technology to streamline the process. An Emergency Management Suite can store all your district's plans and allow you to quickly update them as needed. Additionally, emergency management software allows you to automatically notify staff when policies change.

3. Use multichannel communications to ensure updates are communicated and understood. Incorporate a digital signature requirement and/or mandatory training to verify that staff, students and guardians are aware of these new policies.

Collecting & Managing Threats of School Violence or Concerning Student Behavior

With your team assembled and policies in place, you now have the foundation to begin identifying threats. In this section we will discuss several ways your team can begin collecting reports of concern. You will also learn about tools and training that your team can use to ensure effective threat management.

HOW TO COLLECT REPORTS OF VIOLENT THREATS OR CONCERNING STUDENT BEHAVIORS

One of the greatest issues you face when implementing a threat detection and prevention program is the ability to collect reliable reports of concern. Current statistics surrounding school violence suggest that most behaviors or threats are identified but never reported. This is because individuals fear repercussions from those they report.

Tools like anonymous tip reporting can help to mitigate this fear and encourage community members to report concerning behavior.

A recent study found that

ONLY 42%

of students felt their school had a defined threat/incident reporting process in place.

Source: Navigate360 | Zogby Safety & Wellbeing Poll

THE VALUE OF ANONYMOUS TIP REPORTING & VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Anonymous tip reporting provides your school community with a safe and trusted way to report concerning behaviors. The most effective anonymous reporting programs use 24/7 monitoring services and 2-way communication, ensuring quick routing and effective support for those who pose a threat to themselves or others.

Communicate where and how individuals can file anonymous reports. It is also important to be transparent about what information you collect and how it is used to keep your community safe.

Discover the 5 Benefits of Pairing Anonymous Tip Reporting with Your Threat Assessment Program »

navigate360.com/anonymous-tip-reporting-5-benefits-threat-assessment

ADDITIONAL PROACTIVE TOOLS FOR THREAT DETECTION

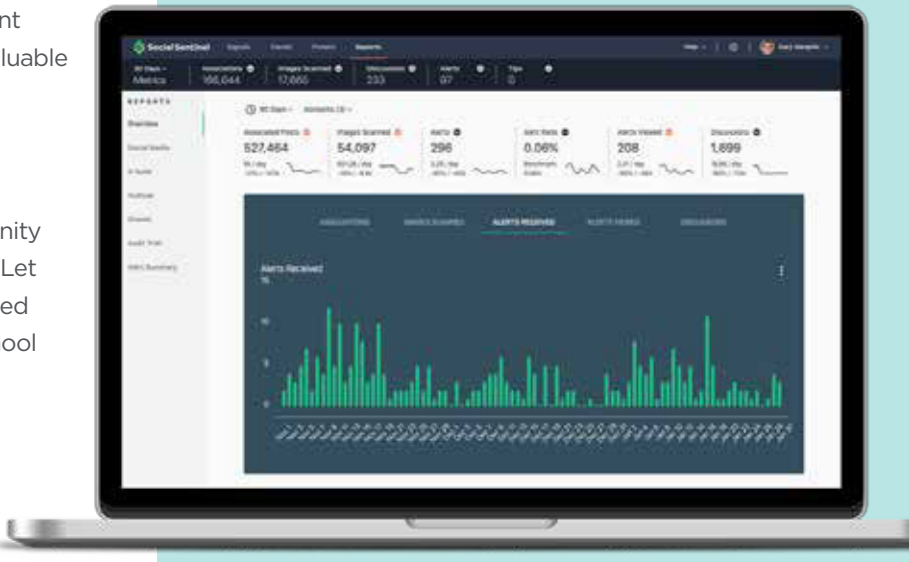
While anonymous tip reporting builds trust and allows individuals to safely report concerns, your team should consider additional proactive tools that monitor and identify threats ethically and accurately.

93%

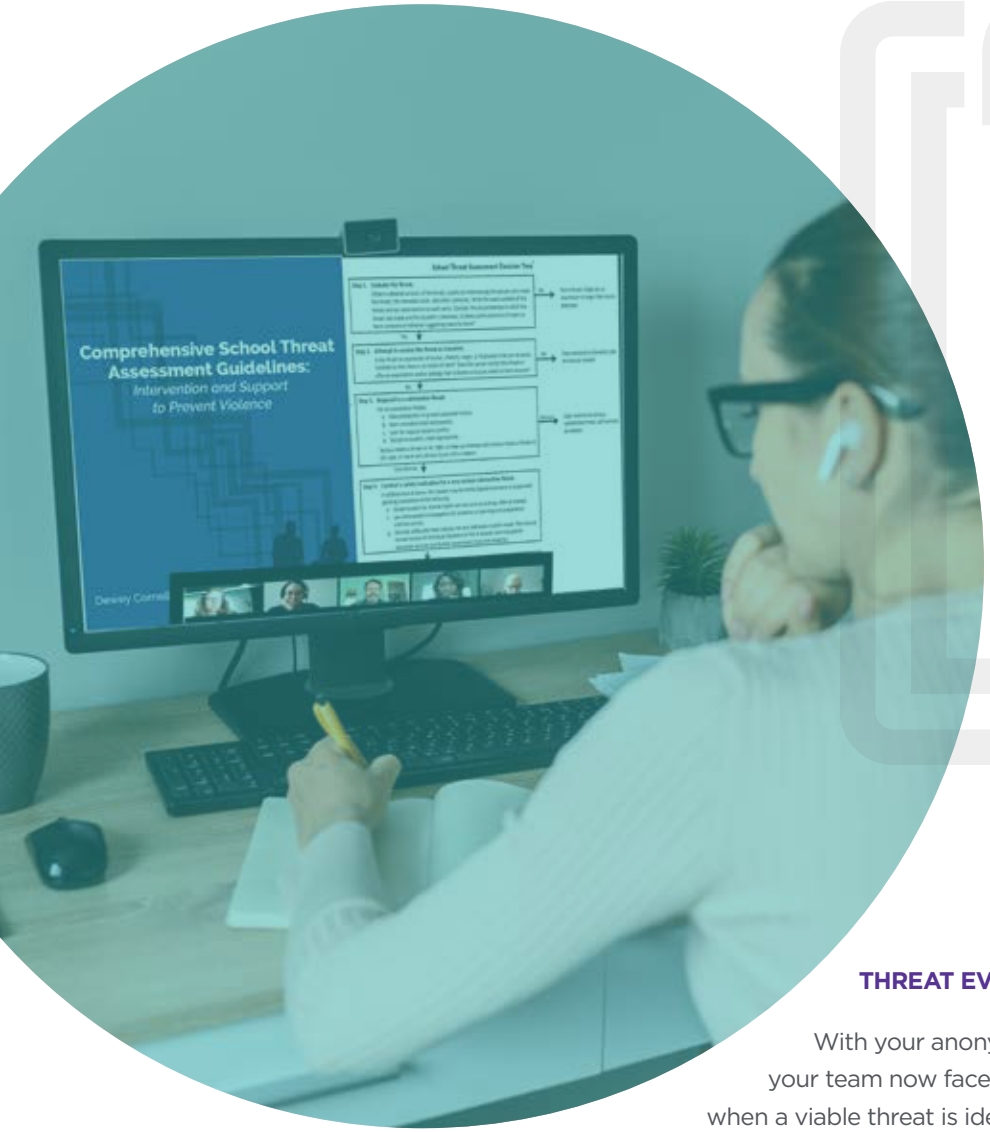
of targeted violent incidents were preceded by behavioral warning signs.

With millions of online conversations happening through social media and e-mail, countless pieces of information could slip through the cracks. Social media scanning and e-mail sentiment analysis provide you with an additional layer of valuable information that could save lives.

Like your anonymous tip reporting system, best practices for social media scanning and e-mail sentiment analysis involve informing your community of these tools and educating them on their value. Let your community know what information is collected and how this information is used to keep your school community safe.



Source: www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2020-09/MAPS2019.pdf



THREAT EVALUATION & MANAGEMENT

With your anonymous tip reporting program in place, your team now faces a bigger question: What do you do when a viable threat is identified?

Routing and evaluation will depend upon the threat assessment model your team has chosen. Your threat assessment model provides you with a consistent process for evaluating threats. It also helps to determine who should be involved, what information is shared and with whom, as well as what your path to intervention or resolution should look like.

Following a structured threat detection and management process allows you to determine where roadblocks appear and helps your team refine procedures for best-practice outcomes.

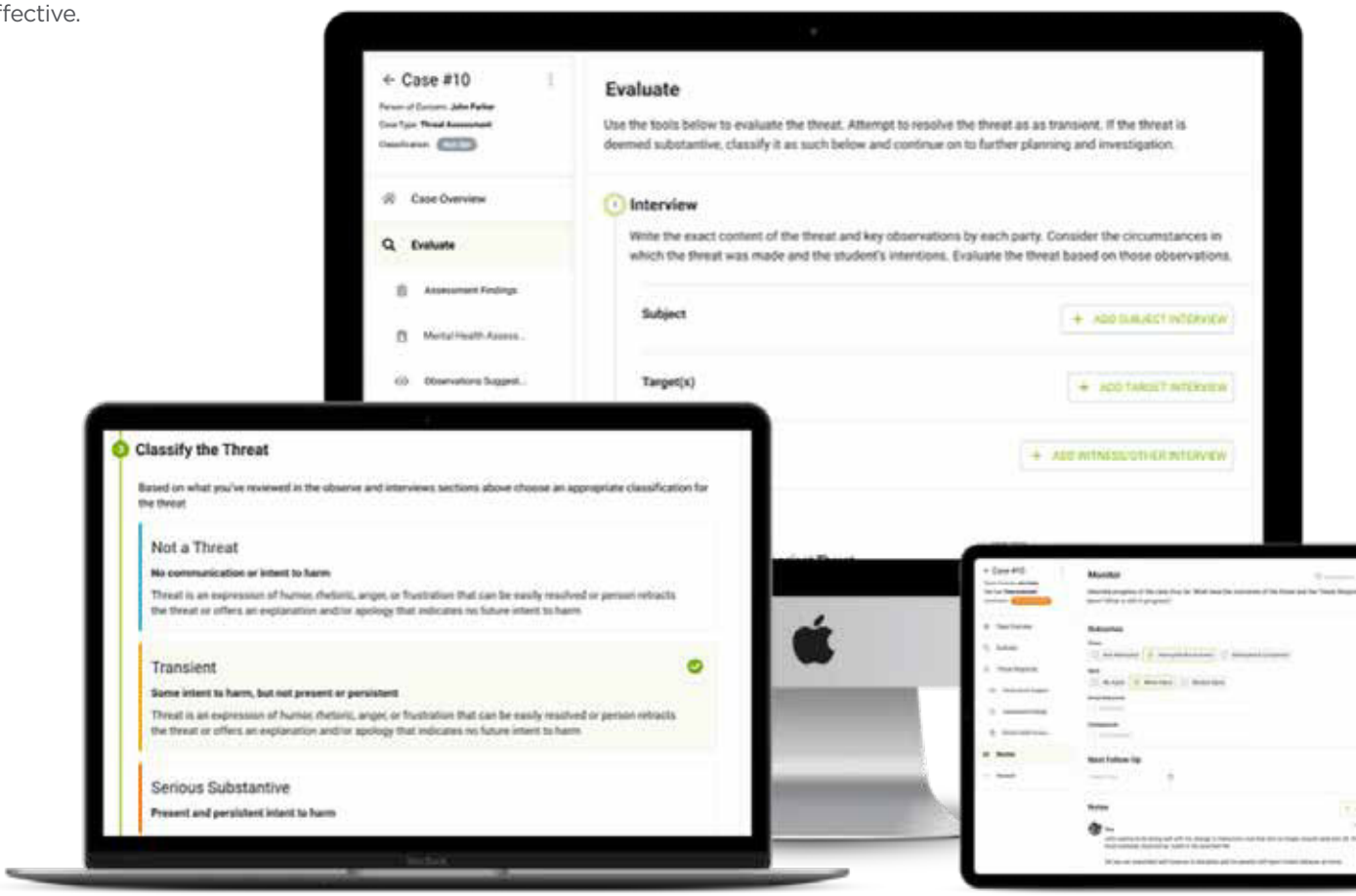
4 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR THREAT ASSESSMENT AND CASE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

1. Build upon your team's strengths with comprehensive threat assessment training. Your team training will depend upon the model you have chosen and may require multiple levels of instruction to be effective.

2. Adopt technology to streamline threat assessment and routing. Make sure your system adheres to your model and your district's policies for the best results.

3. Integrate your other systems, such as visitor management or digital language analysis, to enhance the evaluation process by using multiple data points for clearer assessment.

4. Incorporate social-emotional learning into your team training to build empathy, mitigate bias and improve outcomes.



Steering Students Toward a Safer Path

Your team has a substantial program in place for threat identification and management, and staff has been trained on your chosen threat assessment model and related processes. What happens during intervention and resolution? How do you steer students onto a safer path?

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING: SCHOOL, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

While intervention and support will take many forms, there are universal concepts that your team can apply to strengthen your culture of safety and help those in need – both before an incident occurs as well as during the intervention process.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a proactive way for your school to improve school climate ratings, decrease behavioral problems and build confidence in your students. The five core components of SEL are:

- **Self-awareness**
- **Self-management**
- **Responsible decision making**
- **Relationship skills**
- **Social awareness**

SEL FOR ENHANCED INTERVENTION

While the goal of SEL is to prevent problems before they start, it can also turn discipline into a valuable learning opportunity.

Depending on the concerning behavior or infraction, your team can provide students in crisis with tailored learning experiences that help them understand their own value within your school community as they build empathy for others and work to understand the impact of their actions.

Research has shown that students are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward authority and to the concept of fairness through SEL programs.

INVOLVE CAREGIVERS TO IMPROVE EFFICACY

In addition to students, SEL provides parents, guardians and school staff with accessible resources to reinforce the concepts relayed to their youth. Training your entire community on these concepts establishes consistency and highlights your commitment to building an inclusive and transparent culture of safety.

Review your district and statewide compliance requirements before adopting any SEL programs. Learn more here: casel.org/state-scan-scorecard-project-2/

Summary

The safety of your school community has never been more important. Building a culture of safety during these uncertain times is essential to ensure staff and students can thrive. A transparent and comprehensive threat detection and violence prevention program is a powerful addition to this mission.

Defining and communicating new policies, involving dedicated teams and community stakeholders, and reinforcing concepts of social-emotional learning solidify your commitment to safety and empower your people to reach their full potential.

Additional Threat Detection & Prevention Resources for Schools

Guide: Threat Assessment Starter Kit	*Download the Guide*
Webinar: Emerging Issues in School Threat Assessment, presented by Dr. Dewey Cornell	*Watch the Webinar*
Webinar: Recognizing and Preventing Student Harm to Self and Others During Online Learning, presented by Dr. Dewey Cornell and Dr. Scott Poland	*Watch the Webinar*
Training: Navigate360 CSTAG Threat Assessment Training (Levels 1 & 2), in partnership with Dr. Dewey Cornell	*Complete the Training*
Solution: Navigate360 Behavioral Threat Assessment Case Manager	*Explore Solution*

Build Your Program with Help from the School Threat Detection & Prevention Experts

Contact us today to learn more about our school threat detection and prevention solutions. We provide expert training, smart technology and reliable consulting to ensure your program's success. navigate360.com/contact

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