

# Best Practices in Developing & Managing Behavioral Intervention Teams

UC Student Mental Health Best Practice Conference 2014  
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Los Angeles, California

Phillip Van Saun  
University of California  
Office of the President, Risk Services

# Roundtable Format

- ⌘ Engage the audience in open dialogue and targeted discussion of best practices for campus-based Behavioral Intervention Teams (BIT).
- ⌘ Present current and ongoing research conducted by the collective 10 campus UC system BITs as well as the results of BIT-related research conducted by other sources in higher education.
- ⌘ Share best practices in the process, practice and protocol of assessing behaviors of concern that present the risk of violence and on the process of managing the threat of violence using best-practices applied to campus-based settings.

# Ultimate Goal

Prevent, mitigate, respond and recover from incidents that involve threatening behavior by setting into motion a response which leads to a positive outcome.



# Police knew about killer's videos during check

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD and TAMI ABDOLLAH, Associated Press

Updated 6:27 am, Friday, May 30, 2014

- ⌘ LOS ANGELES (AP) — Santa Barbara County sheriff's deputies who checked on Elliot Rodger three weeks before he killed six college students were aware he had posted disturbing videos but never viewed them before or after determining he was not a threat to himself or others, the department disclosed Thursday.
- ⌘ Police never searched the residence or conducted a check to determine if he owned firearms because they didn't consider him a threat.
- ⌘ Rodger wrote in the manifesto about the April 30 visit by the deputies and said it prompted him to remove most of his videos from YouTube.
- ⌘ He wrote that the deputies asked him if he had suicidal thoughts, but "I tactfully told them that it was all a misunderstanding and they finally left. If they had demanded to search my room that would have ended everything."
- ⌘ According to the statement from the sheriff's office, four deputies, a police officer and a dispatcher in training were sent to Rodger's apartment after being informed by the county's mental health hotline that Rodger's therapist and mother were concerned about Videos he posted online.
- ⌘ Rick Wall, a retired Los Angeles police captain who created the agency's procedures for responding to people with mental problems, said that law enforcement officers **need to look at all the available evidence when conducting investigations**. "Not that the final conclusion that they made on that day would have been any different, but something could have changed," he said.

# UCLA Stabbing Puts Focus on College Students' Mental Health

A recent article discussing the brutal stabbing of a UCLA student in a chemistry lab has raised difficult questions asking why disturbed students are allowed to remain at school despite *red flags* and **obvious warning signs**.

Since Virginia Tech, campuses across the Nation have been working to identify troubled students and potential warning signs of mental illness, violence or other problems. However, **identifying red flags** and *connecting the dots* across multiple people (students, faculty, dorm advisors, mental health, law enforcement, etc.) can be extremely difficult and seemingly very complex.

- ⌘ Students and faculty members said that the UCLA attacker had exhibited erratic and delusional behavior in the past.
- ⌘ One professor notified campus authorities about paranoid and accusatory e-mails the UCLA attacker had sent to him.
- ⌘ Other professors made similar individual reports about the UCLA attacker.
- ⌘ The UCLA attacker also received counseling at the Student Affairs office.

Were any of these incidents enough of a concern to *force the student into treatment*?

Had each of **these dots been connected**, could the stabbing have **been prevented**?

It may be impossible to know for sure, but schools could definitely **implement more proactive steps to connect the dots**.

For example, school leadership should **ensure that all faculty, school administrators, school security officers, school resource officers, counselors, parents, and students** understand their roles and responsibilities for reporting suspicious incidents and behavioral **red flags**. Would anyone disagree that **prevention efforts are more effective and less expensive than recovery efforts**?

# Questions

& What was/is missing?

& What is the goal of BITs?

# Perception and expectation gap

1. Administration
  2. Media
  3. BIT team
  4. Parents
  5. Community
  6. Students
  7. Faculty
  8. Alumni
  9. Others
  10. Family
- ⌘ Internal and external expectations of violence *prediction* and *prevention*
  - ⌘ Improve awareness of the limitations of violence risk and threat assessment and management or the perception and expectation gap
  - ⌘ Refocus change management strategy toward risk and threat assessment, *mitigation*, management and preparedness
  - ⌘ Condition(ed) for disruption



# A new conversation

*“There is no system or process which predicts and prevents violence.”*

# Can't predict violence, but...

- ⌘ Attempts to predict violent behavior have not been successful
  - ⌘ Low frequency event
  - ⌘ Rarely have all the information
- ⌘ Instead look to identify risk factors
- ⌘ Notice and respond to behavior you see or know about

# ...threat scenarios can be managed

- ⌘ Violence is complex, but comprehensible
- ⌘ **How you understand a problem effects how you try to fix it**

*Randy Borum, Psy.D., 1999*

# Best practices for campus-based Behavioral Intervention Teams

- ⌘ Multidisciplinary BIT
- ⌘ Core actions
- ⌘ Standing meetings
- ⌘ Case tracking
- ⌘ Tracking KPIs
- ⌘ Define disruptive (classroom) behavior
- ⌘ Risk sensing
- ⌘ Violence risk assessment
- ⌘ **Integrative threat assessment**
- ⌘ Intervention strategy
- ⌘ Sense-making
- ⌘ Scenario-based violence risk gaming

# Questions

- ⌘ What is the goal of your BIT?
- ⌘ How is this goal made known to the community at large?
- ⌘ What multidisciplinary functions, by position and title, are represented on your BIT?
- ⌘ What other functions/positions should be members of your BIT?

# Best Practice: BIT Core actions

1. Contact and engagement
2. Provide safety and comfort
3. Stabilization
4. Information gathering
5. Offer practical assistance
6. Connect to social support
7. Provide education and resources
8. Link to services and referrals
9. **Direct liaison to law enforcement and campus leadership**
10. **Provide community awareness and training**

# Critical BIT skill-sets

1. **Rapid assessment**
2. **Shift from 'conventional practice'**
3. **Provide outreach**
4. **Tailor services to context/culture**
5. **Ability to handle intense reactions**
6. **Provide clear information**
7. **Can stabilize person in distress**
8. **Need for self care of team members**

# Questions

- ⌘ How are members selected to serve on your BIT?
- ⌘ What training is provided to members of your BIT?
- ⌘ What additional training should be provided?
- ⌘ How does your BIT liaison with law enforcement and campus leadership?
- ⌘ Who on the BIT is responsible to notify law enforcement and campus leadership of a case involving a high risk of violence?
- ⌘ How does your BIT provide community awareness and training?



# Best Practice: BIT Management

- ⌘ **Principle 1. Intervention.** Consider the name **Student Behavioral Intervention Team**. The name is intentional. The notion is an approach that truly seeks to intervene thoughtfully, assertively and **sooner rather than later**. There is a clear expectation to **err on the side of action** as opposed to inaction. To over-react, rather than under-react. We can explain overreaction, but not under-reaction.
- ⌘ Principle 2: Thoughtfully seek to find a balance between protecting the rights of those students who are in crisis while also protecting the safety of the community.
- ⌘ Principle 3: To not have a cookie cutter approach, but to thoughtfully engage each case **individually and thoroughly**, but in doing so, also **not becoming paralyzed by process**.
- ⌘ Principle 4: To not bend to political pressure or ideological pressures, but to work as a team to find the best answer and to try as best you can to **do the right thing** ---whatever that means in any particular case.
- ⌘ Principle 5: **To take decisive action** and not feel that they have to always look over your shoulder.
- ⌘ Principle 6: **Evolve**. We cannot stand pat and must continue to **evolve** our practices and strategies as the characteristics of the problems and issues we face change.
- ⌘ Principle 7: **Self Care**. Take care of yourself so you can take care of others.

Michael Young, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, University of California Santa Barbara

# Questions

- ⌘ How many people are members of your BIT?
- ⌘ How often does your BIT meet?
- ⌘ How do you track BIT cases?
- ⌘ How do you track and report on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)?

# Best Practice:

## Define Disruptive (Classroom) Behavior

Disruptive behavior refers to that which interferes with the normal functions of the college. A few specific examples include the behavior of persons who:

- ⌘ Habitually interfere with the learning environment by disruptive verbal or behavioral expressions.
- ⌘ Persistently make inordinate and inappropriate demands for time and/or attention from faculty and staff.
- ⌘ Verbally threaten or abuse college personnel.
- ⌘ Physically threaten or assault other.
- ⌘ Willfully damage university property
- ⌘ Misuse drugs or alcohol on university grounds.
- ⌘ Threaten or attempt to carry out suicide.

# Best Practice: Risk Sensing

Scan the horizon for threats, risks and opportunities

## Mitroff's Five Stages of Crisis Management

**Signal detection**  
Warning signs & efforts to prevent

**Probing & prevention**  
Search risk factors & reduce potential for damage

**Damage containment**  
Keep from spreading to unaffected areas

**Recovery**  
Establishing a 'New Normal'

**Learning**  
Review and apply lessons

# Best Practice: Violence Risk Assessment

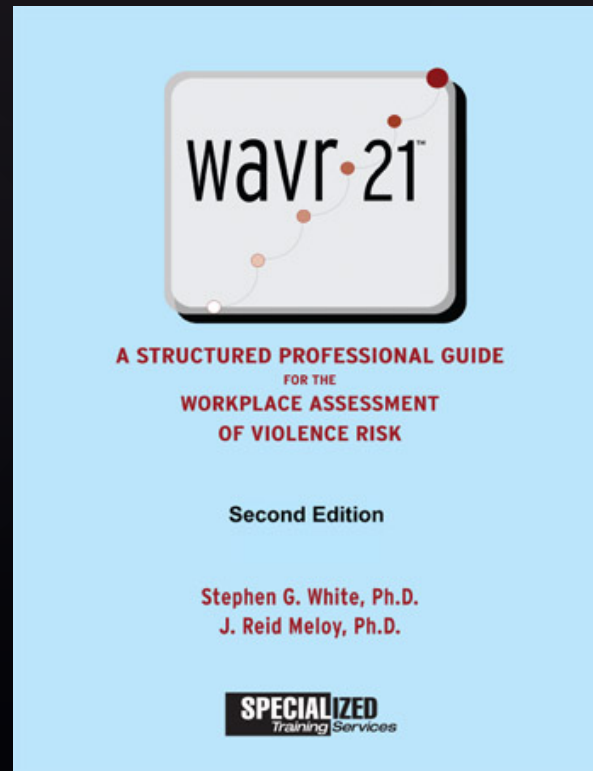
- ⌘ Evaluative tool for assessing behavior – based on published literature
- ⌘ In order to protect:
  - ⌘ University community
  - ⌘ Individual exhibiting the behavior
  - ⌘ Community at large
- ⌘ Doing the best we can to keep people safe

# Violence Risk Assessment

- ⌘ Accepted evaluative tool that assists the team in assessing risk and determining response
- ⌘ Helps identify possibility and prevention of violence
- ⌘ Part of defensible process should a tort claim arise – selected an accepted evaluative tool and used the tool in assessing and responding to the risk

Norm Hamill – UCOP Office of General Counsel

# Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk (WAVR-21)



# WAVR-21 coding grid

**Disclaimer:** The WAVR-21 Coding Grid is intended for qualified clinical and forensic risk assessment professionals ("Professional Users") as a guide for organizing, prioritizing, and interpreting data during the workplace incident or threat management process. Risk assessments using the Coding Grid are to be conducted solely by these Professional Users. The Coding Grid may only be used by Corporate or non-Professional users for educational purposes.

Case/Name Identification: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Completed: \_\_\_\_\_

## WAVR-21 Coding Grid

|   | Risk Factor Items                                       | Absent/<br>Mild | Present | Prominent   | Recent<br>Change<br>(>, o, <)* |
|---|---|-----------------|---------|-------------|--------------------------------|
| 1.  | Motives for Violence                                    |                 |         |             |                                |
| 2.  | Homicidal Ideas, Violent Fantasies or Preoccupation     |                 |         |             |                                |
| 3.  | Violent Intentions and Expressed Threats                |                 |         |             |                                |
| 4.  | Weapons Skill and Access                                |                 |         |             |                                |
| 5.  | Pre-Attack Planning and Preparation                     |                 |         |             |                                |
| 6.  | Stalking or Menacing Behavior                           |                 |         |             |                                |
| 7.  | Current Job Problems                                    |                 |         |             |                                |
| 8.  | Extreme Job Attachment                                  |                 |         |             |                                |
| 9.  | Loss, Personal Stressors and Negative Coping            |                 |         |             |                                |
| 10.   | Entitlement and Other Negative Traits                   |                 |         |             |                                |
| 11.   | Lack of Conscience and Irresponsibility                 |                 |         |             |                                |
| 12.   | Anger Problems  |                 |         |             |                                |
| 13.   | Depression and Suicidality                              |                 |         |             |                                |
| 14.   | Paranoia and Other Psychotic Symptoms                   |                 |         |             |                                |
| 15.   | Substance Abuse   |                 |         |             |                                |
| 16.   | Isolation   |                 |         |             |                                |
| 17.   | History of Violence, Criminality, and Conflict          |                 |         |             |                                |
| 18.   | Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence                      |                 |         |             |                                |
| 19.   | Situational and Organizational Contributors to Violence |                 |         |             |                                |
| 20.   | Stabilizers and Buffers Against Violence                | prominent       | present | absent/mild |                                |
| <b>Additional Item: Organizational Impact</b> |   |                 |         |             |                                |
| 21.   | Organizational Impact of Real or Perceived Threats      |                 |         |             |                                |

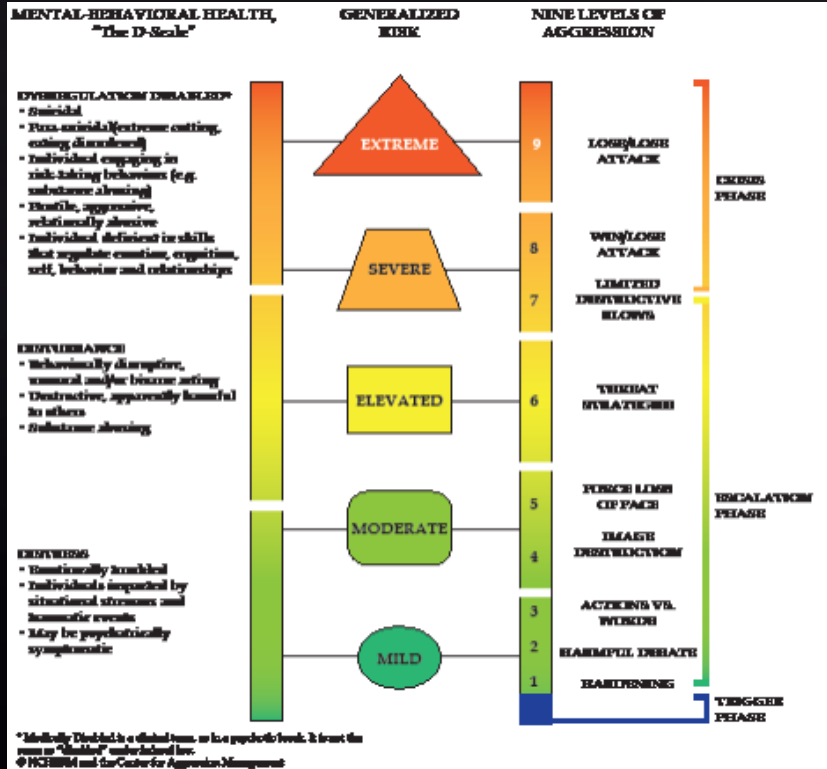
\* > worsening or escalation  
o no change  
< improvement

**Notes:**

- 1.) If data are unavailable or notably incomplete for a risk factor, enter "I" for insufficient information.
- 2.) If "Recent Change" moves two columns in same direction between ratings, enter two checks, i.e., >> or <<.



# NaBITA



# Best Practice: Integrative threat assessment model

## Making an assessment:

- A. Does the person **pose a threat** of harm, whether to him/herself, to others or both?
  
- B. If the person does not pose a threat of harm, does the person otherwise show a need for help or intervention?

# Questions

- ⌘ What definition does your organization use to define disruptive behavior (behavior-of-concern)?
- ⌘ How is disruptive behavior reported?
- ⌘ What is the threshold for disruptive behavior to be reported to your BIT?
- ⌘ What method does your BIT use to evaluate violence risk?

# Best Practice: Intervention Strategy

- ↳ Step 1: Conduct Violence Risk Assessment.
- ↳ Step 2: Convene BIT.
- ↳ Step 3: Develop a Plan.
- ↳ Step 4: Meet with subject. Set behavior guidelines.
- ↳ Step 5: Document each interaction.
- ↳ Step 6: Monitor compliance.
- ↳ Step 7: Reconvene BIT, report findings.
- ↳ Step 8: Refer to police or others as needed.

# Range of Intervention Strategies

**Non-Confrontational**



**Confrontational**

No  
Further  
Action  
Now

Watch  
&  
Wait  
(active vs  
passive)

Monitoring

**Subject  
Interview**

Civil  
Order

Mental Health  
Commitment

Arrest

Assess  
Assist  
Defuse

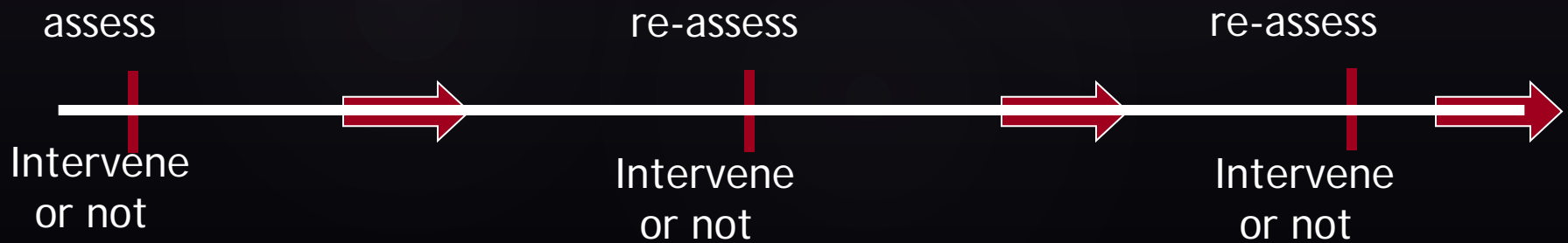
Assess  
Set Limits  
Confront

**Assessment**

*How is the subject reacting to time and  
our continuing intervention decisions?*

# Assess - decide - intervene

Following an individual of interest  
through time and events



# Questions

- ⌘ How does your BIT determine the intervention strategy?
- ⌘ What process is used to judge the effectiveness of interventions?
- ⌘ What is the process to monitor the lifecycle of a BIT case?

# Best Practice: Sense-making

Connecting the abstract with the concrete

- & What does this event/development mean?
- & Redrafting of an emerging 'story.'
- & Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.
- & What do I do next?



# Analysis of Competing Hypothesis (ACH)

ACH is used by analysts in various fields who make judgments that entail a high risk of error in reasoning.

## Steps of ACH.

1. **Hypothesis** – The first step of the process is to identify all potential hypotheses. Process discourages choosing one "likely" hypothesis and using evidence to prove its accuracy.
2. **Evidence** – Lists evidence and arguments (including assumptions and logical deductions) for and against each hypothesis.
3. **Diagnostics** – Apply evidence against each hypothesis in an attempt to disprove as many theories as possible.
4. **Refinement** – Review findings, identifies any gaps, collects any additional evidence needed to refute as many of the remaining hypotheses as possible.
5. **Inconsistency** – seek to draw tentative conclusions about the relative likelihood of each hypothesis. Less consistency implies a lower likelihood. The least consistent hypotheses are eliminated.
5. **Sensitivity** – Test conclusions. Weigh how the conclusion would be affected if key evidence or arguments were wrong, misleading, or subject to different interpretations.
6. **Conclusions and evaluation** – provide the decision-maker with his or her conclusions, as well as a summary of alternatives that were considered and why they were rejected.

# Best Practice: Scenario-based violence risk gaming

Rehearse (game) possible response strategies to various risk and threat scenarios.

**Conduct crisis micro-games.**

# 'Rules of the game'

- & Focus on strategic issues
- & Brainstorm – There is no school solution
- & Open discussion
- & Goal – Improve your ability to prepare, respond and recover from crises

# Problem Based Learning (PBL)

- ⌘ A type of Case Based Learning
- ⌘ “Answers” not provided
  - ⌘ Run in parallel or ahead of emergency exercises
  - ⌘ Cluelessness & struggle ok
  - ⌘ Identify things to look up

# Crisis decision-making micro-games

- ⌘ Present a problem – Problem Based Learning
- ⌘ Facilitate the game
- ⌘ Encourage brainstorming
- ⌘ Identify and adjust for bias in the decision-cycle
- ⌘ Guide the process to fast & frugal decision-making
- ⌘ Close with plus/delta

# Keys to facilitation

- ⌘ Talk no more than anyone else
- ⌘ Ok not to be expert
- ⌘ Guide and steer, don't lead
- ⌘ Expect struggle
- ⌘ Engage those not involved
- ⌘ Challenge way out ideas

# The physical environment – setting up for success

- Facilitate creation of dialogue web:
- & Make the room small
  - & Orient so all equal and facing each other

**Good**

**Facilitator**

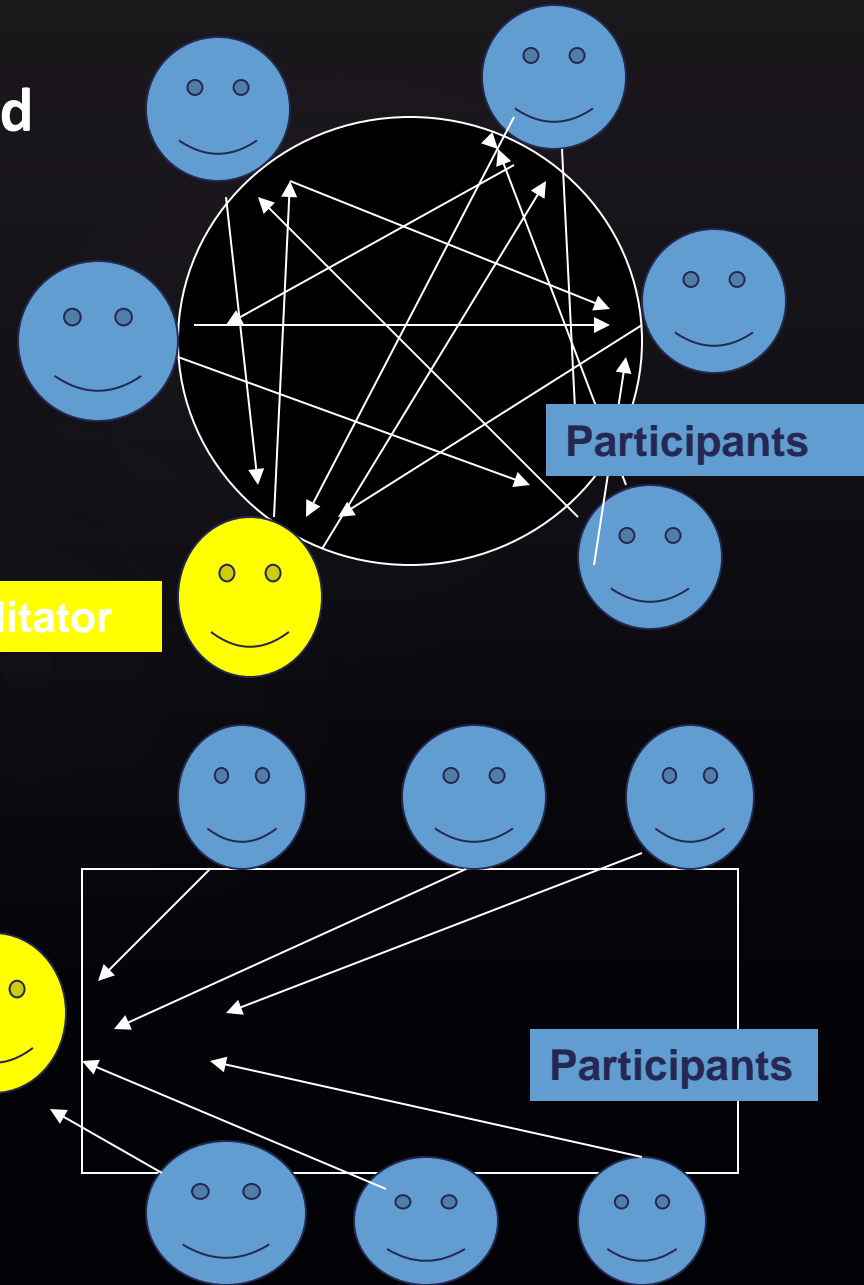
**Vs.**

**Not So Good**

**Facilitator**

**Participants**

**Participants**



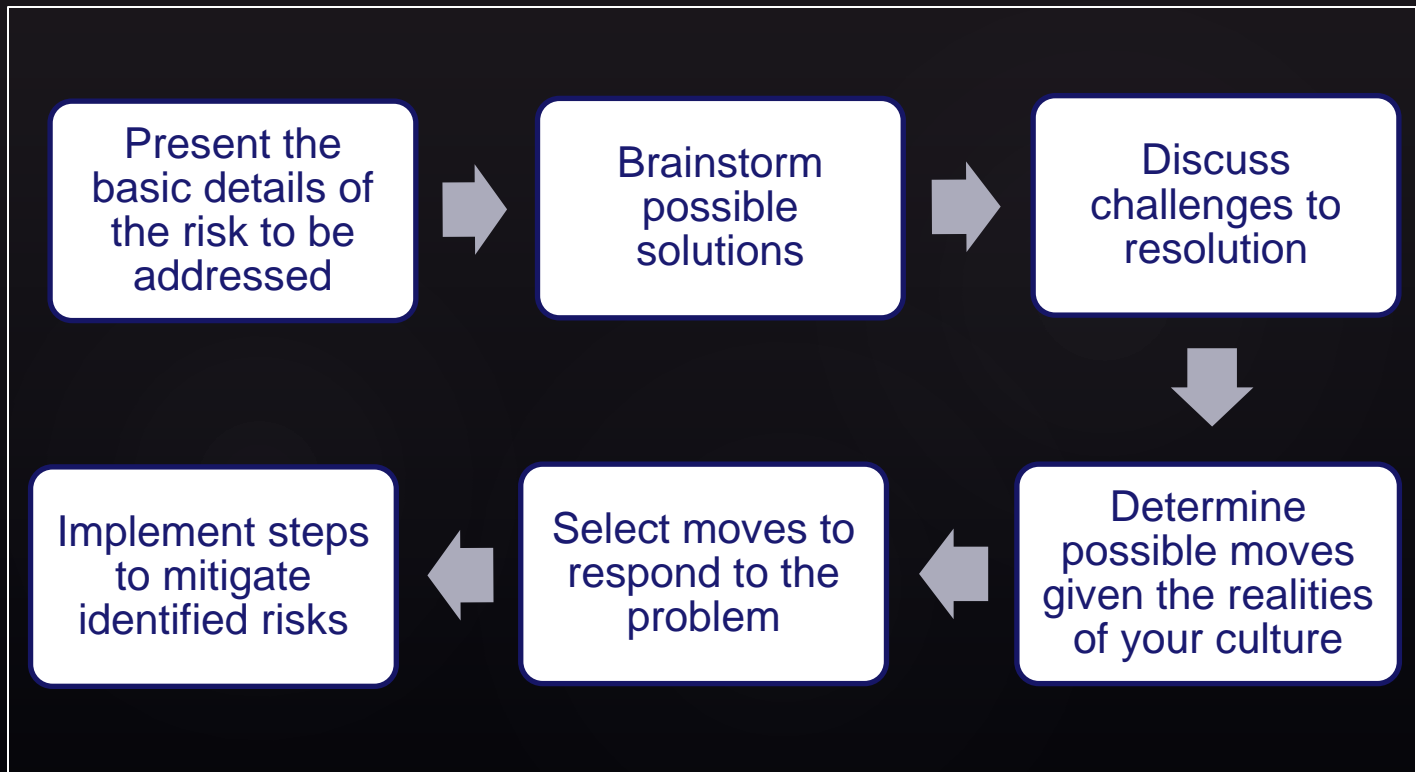


# Practice

Scenario-driven response actions.

Group roll-play response to various, predetermined scenarios, such as;

- ⌘ Loss of temper
- ⌘ Bizarre behavior
- ⌘ Boundary crossing
- ⌘ Violent talk/profanity
- ⌘ Indirect threats of violence
- ⌘ Alarming cyber activity
- ⌘ Property destruction
- ⌘ Inappropriate weapons talk or bringing to campus
- ⌘ Stalking
- ⌘ Bullying
- ⌘ Uninvited contact
- ⌘ Suicidal communication
- ⌘ Direct threats of violence
- ⌘ Physical assault



# 'Reflective' to 'Reflexive' Inculcating a Perishable Skill

- ⌘ 'Training for emergencies is all about teaching the basal ganglia and other brain structures to learn automatic reactions needed to survive'
  - Arnsten, Mazure & Sinha.  
Scientific American. April, 2012.
- ⌘ Conditioning for disruption contributes to successful crisis decision-making.



# 'Fast & frugal' crisis decision-making

“Proper analysis, rather than additional information, often contributes to an accurate judgment.” -Richards J. Heuer

# Crisis Decision-making: Fast & Frugal

Decisions made during a crisis can be improved by training decision-makers to recognize and adjust for bias in the decision cycle and by using fast and frugal decision-making heuristics.

# Fast & frugal crisis-decision tools

⌘ Fluency heuristic - If one alternative is recognized faster than another, infer that it has the higher value on the criterion.

Schooler & Hertwig, 2005

⌘ Take-the-best - To infer which of two alternatives has the higher value: (a) search through cues in order of validity, (b) stop.

Gigerenzer and Goldstein, 1996

# Fast & frugal

- ⌘ A good enough decision.
- ⌘ Made soon enough to matter.
- ⌘ Communicated well enough to be understood.
- ⌘ Carried out well enough to work.

# Questions

- ⌘ How does your BIT engage in sense making?
- ⌘ How does your BIT use scenario-gaming?
- ⌘ What type of crisis planning does your BIT engage?



# Best practices for campus-based Behavioral Intervention Teams

- ‡ Multidisciplinary BIT
- ‡ Core actions
- ‡ Standing meetings
- ‡ Case tracking
- ‡ Tracking KPIs
- ‡ Define disruptive (classroom) behavior
- ‡ Risk sensing
- ‡ Violence risk assessment
- ‡ **Integrative threat assessment**
- ‡ Intervention strategy
- ‡ Sense-making
- ‡ Scenario-based violence risk gaming

# Sources

## ∅ Meloy and White

*WAVR-21 A Structured Professional Guide for the Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk*

## ∅ Gigerenzer and Goldstein

∅ *Reasoning the fast and frugal way: Models of bounded rationality, Psychological Review 103 (1996), pp. 650–669*

## ∅ Educational Advisory Board

∅ *Responding to Students of Concern: Best Practices for Behavioral Intervention Teams*

## ∅ Van Saun

- *Failure Is An Option: A Primer and Guide for Managing Crises.*
- *Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education. USSS/DOE/FBI. (2010)*

**Thank you**