

# BIT/CARE TRAINING

## CASE STUDY: MIRANDA

### **1. Identify the stakeholders in this scenario. Who are the people most likely to be impacted by the case details?**

Miranda and the girls who are teasing her are the main stakeholders in this case. Other stakeholders include any students who may have witnessed this or may have a connection to either Miranda or the other girls involved. The parents of both Miranda and the other girls will likely express concern about the interactions.

### **2. What other case details would be useful to know before moving forward with an assessment of the risk and the development of a plan?**

Knowing a bit more about Miranda's history related to being teased, any suicidal or hopeless feelings she has had, and if this is a rapid shift for her or if she has always had some emotional challenges (beyond being shy and not making a lot of friends). It would also be helpful know if the girls teasing do this commonly, if this was a "teasing of opportunity," or if it had been building for a while. Teasing can often build over time and while there is some data here about the behavior, it is unclear if this has always been the case or if this is new behavior with the girls. Likewise, it would be helpful to know if the teasing is focused on Miranda or something more akin to Mean Girls or Heathers (depending on your age) and a broader style of interactions and school climate.

In terms of the threat assessment, it would be useful to know if Miranda has a history of making threats like this or if this is new behavior. As mentioned in previous cases, this could reasonably be an affective and transient threat based on the shaming and teasing, or it could be the "tip of the iceberg" related to some deeper anger. Little is shared about Miranda's family history, if she has siblings, how they get along and if the parents' separation has been related to violence, substance abuse or an affair.

### **3. What are some of the potential challenges related to this case outside of the school setting?**

It would seem a reasonable starting place to see Miranda's behavior as a reaction to her parents' separation. While this is a good starting place, further exploration is warranted. For example, does Miranda have special needs? Behavioral problems? ADHD? The social and emotional learning (SEL) challenges that occur when outside factors impact a student's learning are well documented. Sadly, many of these stressors occur outside of the school's ability to address them.

### **4. Would there be a benefit to talking with Miranda's parents? Who on the team would do this? Would it make sense to talk to the parents together or separately?**

Miranda's parents would need to be involved for several reasons. The first is related to ensuring permission and consent related to the assessment. As her parents, even with the stress and tension of the separation, they should be given every option to be involved and part of the solution moving forward. There is certainly an art to talking with parents, particularly when there are strong emotions or other conflicts. Perhaps meeting with them together to review the details of Miranda's behavior would be useful starting place. Setting up an expectation that you would like to also talk to each of them separately would also give an added perspective into the nature of the home, marriage separation and access to items such as clean clothes, food, and the like.

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There is also the issue of a potential report to social services about the lack of clean clothes for Miranda. This could be something that indicates other problems in the home such as a lack of food, exposure to violence, or lack of supervision. It would be advisable to tread carefully with the parents around these issues and attempt to explore if this is a one-time oversight with a solution vs something indicating a larger concern.

**5. Would you describe this threat as transient or substantive? Does the art piece escalate or mitigate the threat? Discuss your thought process behind this.**

On face value, the threat is vague, in response to intensely embarrassing teasing and bullying and being very quickly moved to tears. As mentioned in the advanced threat course, 75% of direct communicated threat is neither repeated nor acted upon, and most threat actors are male. It is unlikely this is a threat she would carry out, but it still requires an assessment and clear documentation.

The art piece is certainly odd. As was mentioned throughout the threat course, the assessment of threat must be contextual. It would be useful to understand the parameters of the art project. For example, if the assignment was making a found sculpture of someone you look up to, this would be even more concerning. If the assignment was finding an old doll and create something scary for Halloween, the art is more congruent with the assignment. As with any artist, writer or creative person, asking them about their art or craft with a sense of enthusiasm, curiosity and interest often yields a student who is flattered by the attention (whether or not they admit it directly) and more willing to talk openly about their process.

**6. Consider the following questions asked in this manner to Miranda:**

- **Where did you find the doll and dart to make this?**
- **Can you describe how you were feeling when you made this? ”**
- **How long did it take?**
- **I noticed one foot and one hand were white. Can you talk about that process?**
- **Did you have a picture or idea in mind when you did the bold makeup with the cherry red lips, cotton-candy pink cheeks and baby-blanket blue eyelids?**
- **Was the dart added at the start or the end? You also put the dart right in the center, rather than in the heart or somewhere else. Can you tell me what you were thinking when you did that?**
- **There is a third eye that is open on the forehead. It has the same baby-blanket blue eyelid, but a bright yellow and brown eye. Does the eye see things beyond this world?**

As you can see, asking detailed questions about her process beyond “Hey so, what’s with the creepy clown doll?” is a way to engage her more. I would also suggest following this order, as it builds from very open-ended questions to more limited and direct questions, providing a better chance for her to share back with you. Having an air of curiosity, interest, and desire to understand her process will also help reduce defensiveness in her responses. As to whether this escalates or mitigates the risk, the answer here really depends on how she answers the questions above.

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### **7. Why would it be important to have a bullying prevention program to address the bullying behavior within the school community?**

Bullying is well connected to low self-esteem, academic struggles, self-harm, and suicide attempts. Educating the community around these issues addresses a core CARE and threat team concept, early identification and intervention. By creating a safer community dedicated to addressing those who harm other community members, we are investing in early education, prevention, and intervention of risk.

### **8. What are some creative case-management-oriented ways that could help address the challenges in this case?**

One central issue is related to the problem of obtaining clean clothes. A caring staff member may be willing to wash some clothes for her, or if the school has a washer/dryer (say for sports or an art room), this would be another way to try to help. As with most case management interventions, it is essential they are tailored to the specific needs of the student in conjunction with a caring and supportive approach with her parents. The general attitude toward the parents, for example, may look like this: “We’ve all had tough times emotionally and with money. Let us help you solve, at least for a while, one of the challenges going on for you right now.”

### **9. How and when would you notify the parents of the girls who were threatened? Who would notify the parents?**

There should be some plan to address the girls and their parents. While there is no specific “duty to warn” in this case, the concern here is that in the vacuum of good data and information, there is room for rumors, fear and speculation to grow. As one of the central issues in this case is addressing the community issue of teasing, it is essential to talk with both the girls who were doing the teasing and their parents to ensure they have a chance to make amends and move forward in a positive way.

Similarly, the parents may need some direct time with CARE or threat team staff for them to express their frustrations, worry and fear about Miranda seeking revenge on their children. The school could use this as an opportunity to address the problem and give all involved a way to move forward positively and not dwell on any mistakes that were made by either party.

### **10. What common biases might impact the team’s decision making?**

A central source of bias is allowing personal feelings and passions related to team members’ past experiences with bullying and teasing to modulate the response of the team. With a case like this, there are often consistent arguments like, “Adults shouldn’t step in and fix this. In my day, the kids worked it out themselves and without an adult coming in to ‘fix them.’” This approach better reflects what is in the team member’s heart rather than the facts at hand. Similarly, the team should avoid adopting a singular, no-tolerance policy to threat which would result in a direct process of Miranda for expulsion.