

# BIT/CARE TRAINING

## CASE STUDY: CURTIS

### **1. What are some of the general concerns with this case? Identify all the stakeholders.**

Curtis and the teacher who observe this are two clear stakeholders in this group, as are other students who overheard the discussion, and those who engaged in it with Curtis. There also could be people who were either involved or knew people who were involved in the shooting 100 miles away.

### **2. If the school conducts a threat assessment, what risk factors would you focus on assessing? Would you describe this threat as transient or substantive? Would you lean toward affective or targeted violence?**

It would be hard to fully categorize this as a threat, as the issue seems more likely a video game map, and the game talk is likely being misunderstood or simply disturbing to those who do not engage in the video game playing. The challenge in this case is the face value of the facts and media/parent perspectives that elevate the perception of threat. This should be explored in more detail and with a focus on mitigating personal and team bias, however a reasonable starting hypothesis would be this is a transient threat, if that.

### **3. How quickly should this situation be addressed (e.g., minutes/hours, within the day, within the next several days, within the week)?**

This should be addressed quickly, thinking minutes and hours, by the team and school administration. In this case, it is not the severity of the threat, but rather the growing problem related to crisis communications. The idea here is to “feed the bears” or risk them digging through the trash and finding rumor and innuendo to be treated as fact.

Of note, be cautious about falling into a trap of seeing this as 100% a misunderstanding about video games. You want to move forward with a reasonable hypothesis to test, but do not want to get trapped into a singular way of thinking. Always ask yourself, what is a rival plausible hypothesis in this case? In other words, even if I am sure it is this, what else might it be?

### **4. What risk factors would you assess for with Curtis?**

We would want to assess the fixation and focus of the potential threat, any potential narrowing of fixation or focus on a group or individual he or others are looking to harm, any injustice collecting or teasing (either giving or receiving), and negative life events and loss (such as family stress, failing class, loss of dating relationship, rejection from sports team or club). It would also be useful to assess his access to weapons (particularly lethal weapons), a hardened or locked perspective, objectification of others and suicidal or hopeless thoughts.

### **5. What protective factors?**

Here we would look at how Curtis performs in school, how he is connected to others, his sense of future and hope, his engagement in clubs and sports, and if he is able to engage in critical thinking (e.g., does he understand how unintentional talk about the video game violence may be disturbing to others even if it is not disturbing to him?). We’d also want to look at whether he has a safety net of friends and safe people to talk with.

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### 6. What are some of the potential biases or pressures that may rush the team to an inaccurate assessment or process?

There are several challenges when it comes to bias. These are outlined in more detail in the guide for the course and the slides.

- **Confirmation bias:** Here the danger would be assuming (in either direction) facts about Curtis. If the team assumes he is a threat, the tendency to look only at behaviors that confirm that threat would be a problem. Likewise, if we assume he is not a threat, looking only for data that supports the “not a threat” hypothesis would be equally troubling for a fair and equitable process.
- **Experience bias:** If we have a history with Curtis, or students like Curtis, we will want to be careful again of making assumptions about how he might behave that are based outside the facts of the case in front of us.
- **Dunning-Kruger Effect:** As anyone becomes more comfortable with the threat assessment process there is a danger of jumping to a conclusion that isn’t supported fully. The adage is a little knowledge may be a dangerous thing. Here we want to remain fair and balanced in our assessments.
- **Anchor bias:** While you may have heard about this related to cost and pricing, this also comes to play in a threat assessment process. The cautionary tale here is to be aware of first impressions or anchoring in on a hypothesis and being hesitant to allow yourself to process new data. If you assume in either direction with Curtis, be willing to adjust this hypothesis based on new information and perspectives.
- **In Group/Out Group Bias:** If you personally like playing *Battlefield*, *Fortnite* or *Call of Duty*, you may lean toward assuming that this is not a larger concern without the facts to back this up. Similarly, if you have a strong opinion against violent video games, you may assume malice or danger on Curtis’ part without facts to support these conclusions.
- **Availability Bias:** Here the problem lies with looking at the information you have and not exploring new information that may be hard to come by or take additional effort. In a case like this, the context matters deeply and exploring outside the interview and initial fact pattern is essential.

### 7. Who is best to conduct the behavioral threat assessment? How is this different from a psychological assessment?

Ideally, we are looking for the person on the team who has the confidence to talk with the student and build rapport, has a solid working knowledge of risk and protective factors, and can help reduce the adversarial nature of the interview. As mentioned in the advanced threat course, it is critical that this does not become a psychological assessment with the focus on a level of care placement (e.g., inpatient hospitalization), but rather assesses the balance between risk and protective factors that are present and uses this to develop an estimation of risk and a go-forward strategy.

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### **8. What are some of the services or resources needed for Curtis?**

There could be some utility in a referral to outpatient therapy to address the stress related to this event becoming more public. Likewise, it would be important to really drill down on the concept of insight and why/if Curtis appreciated how these comments may be taken, particularly given the recent school shooting that occurred. Efforts should be made to ensure his academics are able to continue without any significant disruption.

### **9. Who is the best on your team to talk with the parents? Discuss three key talking points you may share.**

Here, the balance will be between someone on the team with authority (e.g., the chair) and ensuring they have a history of good listening, empathy and guidance when working with parents who may be upset or frustrated at how quickly this has escalated. In many ways, Curtis' parents present as stakeholders and invested parties in the entire process and we want to assure they are open to a threat assessment being conducted (perhaps with an awareness that handling this within the school could prevent larger charges or concerns from developing).