

# BIT/CARE TRAINING

## CASE STUDY: ALEX AND SARAH

### 1. Identify the stakeholders and involved parties in this case.

Alex is the focus as he has made the threat and may have some suicidal thoughts that need to be addressed. Sarah also would be a concern in terms of how she feels about these threats and her sense of safety and ability to continue with classes and feel safe at school.

Both sets of parents and guardians will also be key stakeholders, as well as any siblings, particularly if they also attend the school district. Other members of the school community will be involved in a series of concentric circles flowing out from their contacts with both Sarah and Alex. This would include their friends, students they are in class with, and the faculty and staff that know each of them. It would also be worth exploring outside connections such as sports teams, local places they may belong to like gyms or recreation centers, religious groups and the like. While there is less control over these groups, it is important to identify those who may be involved.

### 2. What significance do you place on the text Alex posted on his Facebook page? What about the image of the man in the fire? What do you think that symbolizes?

The profile picture of Alex looks sad, which is to be expected on some level. The man on fire upon first look may be a reference to the pain he is feeling. For those who watch the TV series *Supernatural*, you will recognize the angel Castiel. He is mission driven and often has the role of God's messenger to other characters in the show. Cas is a complicated character, who shifts throughout the series (which spans almost 15 years). Asking questions about why Alex chose this, if he knows the show and how he sees Castiel would be useful to better understand his thinking.

While everyone on the team will not always be up to speed on popular culture (for example, some may have recognized the triangle, circle and square symbols on the website from the Netflix show the *Squid Game*), others may not have understood the reference. To be fair (to be faaaaaaaiiir), this is a teachable moment. It is highly likely that someone on your team picked up on these references, while others may have not. Good threat assessment isn't about knowing all the references, but rather having a team that can catch these points. Allegedly.

### 3. Does this threat seem more transient or substantive? Is this more affective violence or targeted violence? Explain your reasons.

These threats feel transient in their reaction to the break-up, but the increasing level of detail and the Bible verses, along with trench coat man in the fire, may raise the concern. Again, initially, we may see more affective and emotionally reactive violence, but there does seem to be an increase in the anger and feelings of betrayal Alex is voicing.

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

This case should be addressed in hours or the same day in terms of assessment and further exploration. The main reason for this is the vague threat that is made. If Alex did move forward with hurting Sarah, there would be a legal risk to the school in their choice to not further explore what the threat meant and if it was actionable. Even if there was not a plan in place, the concern remains that while a plan is being implemented, the level of risk would continue to rise and perhaps escalate to physical violence.

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### 5. What risk factors would you assess for with Alex?

Alex demonstrates several risk factors of concern. These are listed below:

- **Injustice Collecting:** He seems to hold Sarah responsible for his pain and has begun to set conditional ultimatums on what will happen next.
- **Religion:** This one will be a challenge, as the religion seems to be supporting the idea of a retribution. Assessing the utility of religion and religious practices in Alex's life would be useful to identify as a possible support.
- **Weapons Access:** It is important to assess what weapons are present in the home (or at other homes where Alex would have access).
- **Fantasy Rehearsal:** Any assessment should address how often and for how long Alex entertains thoughts of hurting or killing Sarah.
- **Hardened Perspective:** There is some evidence that Alex's anger is crystalizing and becoming focused on Sarah as the one who is hurting him.
- **Fixation and Focus:** Likewise, Alex doesn't hold the school or his classmates responsible, but rather narrowly blames Sarah for his difficulties.
- **Action and Time Imperative:** Here you would explore the level of detail, time and location Alex may be considering punishing Sarah for her behavior towards him.
- **Suicidal Thoughts and Actions:** Given this event seems to have greatly upset Alex, on-going suicide assessment would be warranted to ensure he will not attempt to kill himself. When someone makes the decision to kill themselves, they also often contemplate what else they would like to do—who would they like to see revenge on, before dying

### 6. What about supportive and protective factors?

- **Supports:** Assess friendships and other adults in Alex's life who care about him would be important.
- **Non-violent Pathways:** Look for ways of thinking or supportive groups that would provide a place for Alex to express his frustration with those who can listen and steer him back to pro-social behavior.
- **Access to Care:** Determine if Alex comes from a background with access to therapy and the ability to access timely and reasonable appointment times for therapeutic assessment or treatment.
- **Other Activities:** Are there other things that Alex may become involved with or expand that would help him feel better about his loss and proceed to move forward?
- **School Performance and Connections:** It would be helpful to understand how Alex is doing in class and if his grades remain adequate. Likewise, this provides some positive goals that could be useful in pushing back against hopelessness and potential desperation.

### 7. Is there a benefit to sharing this threat with Sarah? Is there an obligation to do so?

There is a benefit but there is not an obligation. While the duty to warn in these scenarios (Tarasoff), will not apply to non-clinical staff, there is a benefit to both Sarah and her guardian/parents being told of the threat so reasonable safety and security mitigation protocols may be put into place if warranted.

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### **8. What resources and services would be of use with Alex within your school? Outside of your school staff? What about for Sarah?**

Access to assessment and treatment will be critical for Alex. This could occur on site or be referrals to vetted, off-campus providers. Likely there will be some pushback toward Alex given his threats to Sarah. Sarah would likely need similar access to therapeutic care related to her stress and frustrations over Alex's threats. Keeping Sarah focused on her schoolwork, perhaps even with a referral to the special education or ADA/504 staff to better assess what academic supports and potential accommodations might be needed.

### **9. How does this case change if Alex is a girl?**

I think one of the main changes would be the bias assuming that women wouldn't act out in that same way as men do when they are frustrated. Decisions, particularly those about risk mitigation, should be made with an awareness that most threats like these are neither repeated nor acted upon. There may be complicating issues related to access to care with two women in an intimate relationship and how accepting the community is about gender identity and sexual orientation.