

Threat Assessment in Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools

From time to time situations arise where we become aware of a possible threat against certain individuals or a particular school or worksite. In almost all cases, these threats are not carried out. But, we know that very occasionally in North America, a threat or perceived threat is followed by a serious incident that puts the safety of a school or worksite at risk.

Using the most current research by experts in the field, Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools have developed a threat assessment protocol with other community agencies. It is important for students, parents, staff and the public to understand this protocol, because from time to time the district will take precautionary measures to respond to a potential threat.

We are committed to a safe and supportive environment for all – students, parents and staff. We take all threatening comments and behaviours seriously.

What is a threat?

- A threat is an expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something.
- A threat may be verbal, written, drawn, posted on the Internet or made by gesture.
- In Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools, all threats will be taken seriously, investigated and a response provided.

Everyone has a duty to report

Often when we read in the media about a violent incident, we learn that the threat-maker had made threats in advance of acting violently, but no one took those threats seriously. To keep school communities safe, students, parents, staff and community members must report all threat-related behaviours. Every threat must be taken seriously, thoroughly investigated and a response and follow-through completed.

What is threat assessment?

Threat assessment is the process that is followed when a school becomes aware of a threat made against a student, staff member or the safety of the school building and its occupants. Threats may be made in many different ways – via graffiti written on a wall; through interaction on social media; in an essay written by a student at school; through an anonymous telephone call; or directly to the individual being threatened. Whatever the form of the threat, a threat assessment team will investigate and appropriately address the threatening behaviour.

Who is on a threat assessment team?

The threat assessment team at a school is made up of individuals who have received formal threat assessment training. Members of the team may include the school principal, vice-principal, counsellors, teachers, and representatives of the police, social services and mental health professionals. A similar team at the district level responds to threats that may involve more than one school or worksite.

Background Information

The purpose of threat assessment

In Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools we use the threat / violence risk assessment process in order to:

- Ensure the safety of students, staff, parents, and members of the public.
- Ensure a full understanding of the context of any threats that are made.
- Begin to understand the factors that contribute to the threat-maker's behaviour.
- Be proactive in developing an intervention plan that addresses the emotional and physical safety of the threat-maker and others.

How will things look different in schools because of threat assessment?

Occasionally, we will put extra security measures in place at a school while a threat is being investigated and assessed. This will happen more frequently than it did before we started using the threat assessment process. This does not mean that there are a greater number of threatening situations than there were before, but that we are now more aware of the need to investigate all threats and increase security if necessary. Whenever there is such a situation at a school, we will provide students, parents and staff with as much information as possible, but privacy laws may prevent us from disclosing personal information about individuals.

If extra security is being provided at your school or worksite as a result of threat assessment, please remember that the purpose is to be pro-active to ensure the safety of the school. It is better to have been over-cautious than to have ignored a possible threat.