

Types of Threat



TRANSIENT THREATS/HOWLERS

These types of threats do not express lasting intent to harm. They are typically made in reaction to an intense, emotional, and passionate conflict. They are often made to protect reputation or “save face” and rarely a high likelihood of follow up or action. Approximately 70% of threats made in primary and secondary schools are transient.

SUBSTANTIVE THREATS/HUNTERS

These threats often conceal a more substantive intent to harm others in a predatory, mission-oriented attack. Substantive threats are more lasting and intentional, reaching beyond the current incident. In comparison to transient threats, substantive threats are 36 times more likely to be carried out.



ELEMENTS OF THREAT

- ❖ **Lethality.** Threat lethality represents the extent to which a particular threat has a high likelihood of resulting in death. For example, the possession of a firearm and ammunition combined with a threat to shoot up a LGBTQ+ rally on campus has a high likelihood of lethality whereas a transient threat to “make them shut up” by a student without access to a firearm would likely have a lower lethality. Assessments of lethality may require deeper exploration into social media, past behavior, and determination of weapons access.
- ❖ **Action and Time Imperative.** Action and time imperative refer to the time and location of an attack. If the threat contains a high degree of detail, this should be considered a heightened risk. If someone posts online, “The day of the rope will be this Friday at 9 p.m.” this is a higher concern than, “One of these days, there will be a reckoning for the Jews and Blacks.”
- ❖ **Fixation and Focus.** This relates to a narrowing down on a specific target. Fixations are hardened points of view, bordering on obsession, concerning a certain group being at fault and deserving of punishment. A focus builds off a fixation and further narrows onto a smaller group or a single person. For example, “I’m going to make those Asians pay for the COVID disease they brought to our country” would be a fixation on Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders. The threat, “I’m going to firebomb the corner store and rid our neighborhood of those rice eaters for eating those bats and killing American Patriots” would include both a fixation and focus.

TYPE OF THREAT	EXAMPLE
Direct	“I’m going to blow up the library.”
Indirect/Vague	“Something bad is going to happen to the library.”
Direct w/action/time imperative	“I’m going to blow up the library Tuesday at 3.”
Conditional ultimatum	“If you don’t give me a good grade, I’m going to blow up the library.”
Transient	Frustrated about an assignment, a student throws a book and yells, “Burn this down!”
Substantive	“I’m going to bring a water bottle of gasoline to spread on these books and light it up.”
Howling	“You can’t treat me like this. I’m going to set fire to the world and roast marshmallows!”
Hunting	“I have what I need. I know what I’m going to do. #fire #library”
Vague but direct	“Something bad is happening in the library soon.”
Direct but vague	“They might want to invest in fire extinguishers around here.”