

RiskWatch Bulletin



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Developing Behavioral Intervention-Assessment Teams¹

It was 10 years ago last month that Seung-Hui Cho, a senior at the Virginia Polytechnic and State University, shot and killed 32 people and wounded 17 others in two separate attacks approximately two hours apart. It was the second deadliest shooting carried out by a single gunman in US history. It sparked intense debate about gaps in the US system for treating mental health issues and the responsibilities of college administrations. An eight-member panel that reviewed the circumstances of the shooting made more than 70 preventative recommendations directed to colleges, universities, mental health providers, law enforcement officials, and emergency service providers.

One of the outcomes of the Virginia Tech review was the establishment of what came to be known as Threat Assessment Teams – a group of professionals experienced in conducting a post-event security review and in addressing and evaluating potential threats to a school’s security. Second-generation protocols, however, show a dramatic shift to proactive prevention of dangerous or potentially harmful behaviors. While reactive measures may have great worth, a key role of business, educational and risk leaders is to focus on the proactive prevention of tragic events.

In today’s environment, many of our staff will interact with, or be confronted by, students or other employees who display concerning behavior. The Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT)/Behavioral Assessment Team (BAT) Model is specifically designed to assist in addressing these issues.

A BIT/BAT is a multi-disciplinary group whose purpose is to meet regularly to support its target audience (students, employees, faculty, staff) via an established protocol. The team tracks “red flags” over time, detecting patterns, trends, and disturbances in individual or group behavior. The team receives reports of disruptive, problematic or concerning behavior or misconduct, conducts a review, performs a threat assessment, and determines the best mechanisms for support, intervention, and response.¹

A behavioral intervention team is a specific model that has no parallel. For example, many entities use Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) for employees who are experiencing psychological or coping problems. But a BIT/BAT is designed to identify behaviors prior to the time an EAP is needed, to engage with a higher level of intervention than an off-site EAP would provide, and to engage with less persuasion and more authority, if needed.

In general, a BIT/BAT serves several major functions for the organization:

- Act in a proactive manner to assist staff/students;
- Maintain confidentiality and handle all matters discreetly;
- Provide consultation and support to staff and students;
- Connect staff and students with needed resources; and
- Recommend interventions or sanctions.

¹ Definition taken directly from the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association (NaBITA)

The BIT/BAT process does not replace staff or student management, disciplinary processes, or public safety responses to incidents. Additionally, the BIT/BAT process works within all current entity policies and serves as a model to appropriately assess and respond to what may appear to be isolated behaviors of concern.

Each BIT/BAT is composed of representatives from areas of the organization's community and includes:

- Human Resource Director (employee involvement)
- Dean or District Representative (student involvement)
- Counseling Services Representative
- Security/Law Enforcement/SRO Representative
- Directly Involved Staff/Student Supervisor

Additional members from the organization's community are included when necessary.

In general, any behavior that disrupts the educational/working environment or which causes concern for an employee's/student's well-being should be reported to the BIT/BAT. Behaviors of concern might be observed in a number of settings: the classroom; a service location or office; an extracurricular or social activity; or a cubicle or break room. By reporting behaviors that are concerning, the BIT/BAT team may be able to reach out to staff or students to provide support or intervention, and to connect them with resources that may be of assistance. All employees should be trained in the purpose of the BIT/BAT, what to report, and how to report.

Once a report is submitted, the Chair of the BIT/BAT would determine whether the matter should be reviewed by the full BIT/BAT. Once reviewed, the BIT/BAT may recommend no action, assist faculty or staff in developing a plan of action, refer the employee/student to existing resources, refer the student/employee to community resources, or make recommendations consistent with existing policies. BIT/BAT records are kept strictly confidential.

We know from research that most perpetrators of violence do not emerge from the ether with surprise attacks no one saw coming. Instead, it is quite the opposite. The development of a well-equipped, fully-engaged, well-supported BIT/BAT offers a multi-faceted, proactive approach to minimizing threats while at the same time providing a support mechanism for students and staff. If you have not already done so, we encourage your organization to form a BIT/BAT right away.

i All information for this article was gathered from articles published by The National Center for Higher Education Risk Management (NCHERM), the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association (NaBITA), and Central Pennsylvania Community College

2 *Second Generation Behavioral intervention Best Practices*, Brett A. Sokolow, J.D., and W. Scott Lewis, J.D., National Center for Higher Education Risk Management

