

What Parents Need to Know About Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) in B.C. Schools

Speaker – Kevin Cameron

Kevin Cameron – is the *Executive Director for the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Human Response*.

- Board certified expert in Traumatic Stress.
- Diplomate – American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress.
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Breakout session – follow up to earlier keynote presentation by Kevin Cameron that looked at how systems dynamics (i.e., families, schools & functional community programs) can either increase or decrease the level of risk depending on how well parents/caregivers and school staff together are connected.

Questions:

- What does Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) mean?
- Does your school district have a VTRA team? If so, is it working?
- Does your school have a VTRA team? If so, is it working?
- What should you know about VTRA teams?

Multidisciplinary VTRA teams – trained to determine current risk for harm to self and others.

- Plan comprehensive data driven intervention using case specific data

Intent of presentation – provide information about VTRA.

- VTRA pulls together practices of threat assessment & forensic and general violence risk assessment.
- VTRA works well when it is done right → everybody needs to do VTRA.

Opening remark – BC is the 1st province in Canada to make VTRA part of Throne Speech.

- 5 year initiative – ERASE.
- Quote – “Everything is real, not theoretical”

VTRA → Community Protocol → Multidisciplinary agency model.

- Includes “intervention”

Even though two schools could be subjected to the same crises or traumatic incident (e.g., suicide, car accident, serious violence) → no two schools or school districts functions the same.

Kevin provided a visual protocol example from Ontario – 9th edition (January 2011) – identified who all is involved (see “Community VTRA Protocol: Violence Threat Risk Assessment – October 2011” document).

- Multi-ministry collaboration → “Brockville Protocol”
 - Signed off by school board directors, all police departments, child family services, family protection, hospitals, youth services.
- Lots of colour.
- Collaborative response to assessing potential for violence.
 - Visualize a bunch of interconnected puzzle pieces.
 - 1 piece – police services, youth justice, CAS (Children’s Aid Society).
 - 1 piece – mental health community agencies.
 - 1 piece – student & family.
 - 1 piece – schools & school boards.
- Kevin talked about youth gang work in Surrey
- Human Resources – relationships & workplace.

Kevin spoke about when there is no “open” system in schools → data is collected after threat and then sits in the desk.

- Kevin mentioned naturally open systems – e.g., student submitted a “hit list” they were aware of as a class assignment.

Kevin mentioned the “Human organism”

Kevin talked about the case of the father that killed his 3 children in Merritt – in that case the father was in and out of police custody 3 times in the week leading up the killings.

Serious violence is an evolutionary process → not a moment in time where someone “snaps”

- Likely there is or was “extreme violence” within the home.

Kevin talked about when media interviews neighbours following the killing of someone and then the killer kills themselves.

- They’re usually “nice” to their neighbours – i.e., “I can’t believe [he] could do something like this. [He] seemed like such a nice person”

Kevin provided an example of a Stage 1 VTRA Report Form.

- Data collection & immediate risk reducing interventions.
- List of high-risk behaviours addressed in protocol → violence/threat making behaviours.
- 3 primary hypotheses in VTRA identified:
 1. Interview threat maker **after** the initial data has been collected.
 2. **Never** more than two people in room interviewing threat maker or child/youth of concern.
 3. Remember to distinguish between **assessing the threat** versus **assessing the threat maker**.

Kevin said that all communities have had or done the “Level 1” training – I believe he referred to the ERASE bullying course.

Kevin recommended holding breakout sessions in school district to “test the waters”

- Include PAC participants.
- How many teachers know if there is a VTRA protocol in place in your school district?
- Should all parents be part of the VTRA team – “No”
 - Should parents receive VTRA training? – “Definitely” → “Information is power”

“All Systems Go” after a traumatic incident → take care of these groups in this particular order.

1. Students.
2. Staff.
3. Parents.

Kevin agrees that “more money will not solve the problem”

- Right people are already in place, i.e., professionals → all key folks & able to gather data.
- Is all about “open” versus “closed” systems.

Final point – University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon) has one of the best VTRA protocols in the country.

Wrap up: Kevin Cameron’s strategy – cliché → “squeaky wheel gets the grease”

Footnote: Currently there are VTRA protocols posted for the Comox Valley, Langley & Chilliwack School Districts.