

# Culturally Competent Crisis De-Escalation Training

## Understanding the Pathway to Violence

The four steps in the escalation to violence are:

1. **Ideation.** The pathway to violence begins with thinking about hurting those who have wronged them.
2. **Planning.** Next, they develop a plan to make those others pay for what they have done.
3. **Acquisition.** Here, they acquire the schematics, weapons, explosives, and other materials needed.
4. **Implementation.** Finally, they move to action and put the plan into practice.

Those on this pathway offer observable clues that can be useful for the BIT/CARE team, human resources, and law enforcement. Imagine a student who becomes infatuated with another student and sees her as the best thing that every could happen to him. Having her on his arm would literally change every part of his life. People would respect him and other women would finally see him as someone who was successful and attractive by proxy. He fantasizes about being with her; finally having his perfect woman. He gets the courage to ask her out and she immediately laughs at him and rejects him. Others see this train wreck of an approach and tease him relentlessly. He becomes more disillusioned by his failure, and he gets rageful toward those who tease him and the woman who turned him down. While he could certainly make a direct threat like, “if you keep teasing me, I’m going to make you pay!,” it is also likely he could become more withdrawn, socially isolated, depressed, tearful, and hopeless about things ever being different for him. If he were to plan to harm those around him, it might be that he follows the pathway to violence and begins by thinking—**ideating**— and fantasizing about hurting those who teased him or the woman who laughed at him and shut him down. He may then escalate this through **planning** to devise a way to have them pay for what they did to him. He could write about these plans at home on his anonymous blog or at lunch in a notebook. These plans could then escalate as he starts to **acquire** the weapons, schematics, explosives, or other elements needed to punish them. The moment of **implementation** comes when he moves from his fantasy rehearsal to putting the plan into practice.

One popular approach to threat assessment is found in the notion to “look for the silence” or the times where a previously concerning individual has “dropped off the radar.” While the optimistic among us may hope that the individual got better and improved, a more realistic assessment is that they have fallen further away from those relationships that may have been stabilizing influences and protective factors and now are without any support. The lack of threat or quiet may not be a reason to lower the risk, but instead may be the time where the individual is developing a plan of attack, acquiring weapons, learning the schedule and habits of their target, and moving closer and closer to implementation. Jared Loughner was quiet for close to four months between his October 4th voluntary withdrawal from Pima College and his January 8th attack. Seung-Hui Cho, from the Virginia Tech attack, had no reports of any concerning behaviors in the spring of 2007 prior to his April 16th assault. He calmly and methodically obtained weapons, rented a van, recorded a manifesto, practiced his shooting, locked the doors with chains, and planned the other details of his deadly assault. All of these behaviors provided potential clues and information useful to thwarting the attack. Very few of Cho’s behaviors prior to the attack could be described as directly communicated threats.

The best hope of thwarting their plan requires an attention to patterns and behaviors that, when viewed together as part of a larger picture, may help illuminate the individual’s path to violence.