



Elk Island Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA)

**A shared commitment to respond to threats and
prevent violence in the Elk Island region**

2022 • Attachment B



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Violence, Trauma and Suicide Prevention (VTSP) Protocol

The work of VTRA falls within the Strathcona County *VTSP Protocol* and upholds the foundational elements of this protocol, including but not limited to its guiding principles, vision, mission, outcomes and information sharing and documentation practices as outlined in the *VTSP Protocol* document.

It is also recognized that the Elk Island VTRA is developed to support VTRA response for organizations and communities that fall outside of the geographical region of Strathcona County but inclusive of the Elk Island school divisions. VTRA members and partners that sign the commitment to participate in the Elk Island VTRA do so with this understanding. Those that sign the *VTSP Protocol* inherently commit to VTRA by way of the overarching protocol.

Any references made in the context of the Elk Island VTRA to the work of the *VTSP Protocol* should be considered for applicability in geographical regions beyond Strathcona County and when appropriate, replaced with like-work practices. When considering documentation and privacy, minimum thresholds as outlined by specific and applicable privacy legislation will be upheld by any VTRA partner, regardless of geographical region.

Elk Island Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA)

As an element of the *Violence, Trauma and Suicide Prevention (VTSP) Protocol*, the purpose of VTRA is to promote a common language and understanding of threat assessment, make use of the expertise of community partners and encourage a multidisciplinary approach to violence prevention. Trained VTRA teams work from the perspective that serious violence is an evolutionary process and therefore no one just snaps. Pre-incident data is often available to help identify and prevent serious violence.

The role of the VTRA team is to determine why there was an increase or change in the baseline behaviour and whether the individual poses a risk to self or others. The process of data collection and assessment is not modified other than to ensure the appropriate interviewing strategies are used for individuals with diverse needs.

The development of this protocol provides guidance for community-based VTRA activations and is intended to be inclusive of school-based activations. Acknowledging there are some VTRA considerations unique to school settings, appendices to this protocol provide school-specific guidance that may not be applicable to community-based activations.

This protocol is founded on the work of the North American Center for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (NACTATR) and as such, reflects research and evidence-based practices from the fields of medical and mental health, law enforcement, threat management and more. Additionally, much of this protocol is adapted from the original Elk Island VTRA Protocol (2017) and acknowledges the work and learning that influenced its development both by present partners as well as the previous VTRA Steering Committee.

VTRA Team Membership

As specified in the *VTSP Protocol*, activation requires core members to be called together to evaluate risk based on information at hand and to determine next steps. This would most commonly involve:

- RCMP, represented by a VTRA-trained member
- School division (one or both school divisions)
- Strathcona County Family and Community Services
- Alberta Health Services

An informed VTRA response is supported by having appropriate and sufficient membership to best gather information and assess risk. Core members will work together to identify other community partners or individuals whose participation is likely beneficial to the desired outcome. This may include school administrators, counselling members, Children's Services, Family and Community Services, Alberta Health Services and/or other community agencies that hold relevant expertise.

When to Activate

Any partner agency can activate VTRA at any time. Sometimes it's difficult to determine whether or not to activate a formal VTRA process. The following guidelines are intended to help members/partners decide if a formal VTRA is needed. It's important to carefully consider each individual incident to ensure the most appropriate response. It is also significant to ensure that information gathering is thorough and involves core members of VTSP to support in making informed decisions.

High-risk behaviours are those behaviours that cause concern for members of the community and may indicate that an individual is moving towards the risk of serious violent behaviour. Formal categories for immediate VTRA activation include, but are not limited to:

- serious violence or violence with the intent to harm or kill another person
- verbal or written threats to seriously harm or kill others or cause significant property damage (clear, direct, plausible)
- internet, website and social media threats to seriously harm others
- possession of weapons—including replicas
- bomb threats—making and detonating explosive devices
- fire setting
- sexual intimidation or assault
- extreme cases of bullying and harassment
- gang-related intimidation and violence
- rehearsal behaviours or evidence of planning
- hate incidents motivated by factors such as race, culture, religion or sexual diversity

In many situations there are also lesser yet still worrisome behaviours present that should not be ignored. These include but are not limited to:

- writing stories, journal entries and blog posts that contain violent content
- social media messaging
- drawing pictures of a violent nature
- making vague threatening statements
- unusual interest in fire
- significant change in anti-social behaviours—a change in baseline

In situations with worrisome behaviours, VTRA activation may not initially be warranted, however, these warning signs should not be ignored. In many cases, gathering information provided by members/partners provides a more holistic picture that may warrant following up on these behaviours to implement adequate early intervention measures. There are also situations where the worrisome behaviour, in context of other data, can develop a very different picture that evolves quickly to require VTRA activation.

Suicide as a Consideration

Pursuant to the information outlined in *Attachment C: Suicide Prevention and Response*, there are instances where the risk of suicide should be considered in the context of VTRA. Evidence of fluidity, suicide pact, conspiracy of two or more, or multiple suicides in quick succession in a community would warrant VTRA activation.

Immediate Risk Situations

When immediate risk to safety is identified, call 911 and implement applicable lockdown procedures immediately. Examples of this may include lethal weapons, dangerous person inside or on periphery of the building or active shooter scenarios. These are emergency situations requiring immediate police intervention and protection. The Stage 1 VTRA (the threat and risk assessment) should not be initiated until the situation is stabilized.

VTRA Activation and Stages

Effective VTRA Approach

VTRA is not intended to be a disciplinary or punitive measure. VTRA activations are for the purpose of understanding and evaluating risk to prevent harmful and/or violent acts.

Activations should be based on concerning behaviour(s) and do not hold prejudice or bias towards individuals involved. VTRA-trained professionals have a responsibility to activate VTRA when appropriate.

Protocol members/partners participating in VTRA will recognize the need to approach the situation and individuals involved in a way that is respectful, strength-based and trauma-informed while balancing the need for a timely response to the potential of violence.

Where possible, the VTRA Lead should be intentional in structuring traumatically informed meetings/conversations that consider physical set-up, tone, flow and participation.

VTRA and Criminal Charges

In the instances of violence or criminal threats, the RCMP member assigned to the VTRA team has the first call to determine if charges will be laid. If charges are laid and/or a police investigation is being conducted, it doesn't prevent the remaining VTRA members from continuing with data collection relative to the threat assessment. Good communication between the police and VTRA team is important to ensure any investigation is not compromised.

VTRA Response Flow Chart

Worrisome, high-risk and/or threatening behaviour identified by Site-Specific VTRA Team

Site-Specific VTRA Screening

Team partners along with VTSP protocol partners (as appropriate) investigate immediate facts

Information is **substantiated** and VTRA intervention is deemed appropriate

Information is **unsubstantiated** or other intervention (outside VTRA) is more appropriate

Decision: Continue

Decision: Not Continue

Activate STAGE 1 VTRA

VTRA leads are contacted and the Stage 1 team completes the data collection and VTRA report

Consider community impact and need to notify VTSP Lead Organization

Individual response by community organizations as identified; follow consent practices as per organization's requirements.

STAGE 1 Intervention Plan Development and Implementation

Put into action risk-reducing interventions. Consider if it's appropriate to continue to STAGE 2 or if a STAGE 1 VTRA is satisfactory

Decision: Continue to STAGE 2 VTRA

Decision: Continue directly to follow up

Activate Stage 2 VTRA Multidisciplinary Risk Assessment

It is important to maintain current Stage 1 interventions until Stage 2 intervention plan is developed

Notify VTSP Lead Organization of STAGE 2 activation and coordinate lead if/as needed.

STAGE 2 Longer Term Multidisciplinary Intervention Plan is developed and implemented

30-Day Follow Up

Continue to monitor, evaluate and revise the intervention plan as needed.

Stage 1 VTRA

The Stage 1 process is managed by the originating organization. Typically, the VTRA Lead from the originating organization will lead the VTRA process, supported by the VTRA-trained RCMP member and other agency team members (see Appendix 1: Stage 1 Report Form, for a step-by-step guide on the VTRA process for both community and school-based activations). The VTSP Lead Organization can also support this function if needed.

Stage 1 VTRA tasks include:

1. Conduct data collection and analysis
2. Determine immediate risk-reducing interventions
3. Triage the remaining Stage 1 risk enhancers
4. Develop Stage 1 data-driven intervention plan
5. Decide if Stage 2 VTRA is required

The primary purpose of Stage 1 VTRA is to:

- Determine if the threat maker poses a risk to the target being threatened
- Determine if the threat maker poses a risk of violence in general—overall level of risk; and
- Plan immediate interventions for any risk enhancers identified

A Community Trauma Lens

When determining the risk that a threat maker poses, the VTRA team should also consider the sustained or potential traumatic impact to the greater community as part of the *VTSP Protocol*. Should further consideration or action be required because of the community impact, the VTRA Lead should contact the VTSP Lead Organization to inform of the VTRA situation and related concerns for the “community as client.” This important step allows the VTRA team to remain focused on the intervention to prevent violence and allows the VTSP Lead Organization to coordinate a TES response, should this step be deemed appropriate.

Mitigating Risk

It is essential to determine if the threat maker has immediate access to the means to carry out a threat such as a knife or gun. Sometimes, there is evidence of planning or weapons in the threat maker’s personal spaces, such as their car, bedroom, etc.

Prior to engaging in a search of the threat maker's spaces, the following questions must be asked and answered given Section 8 of the Charter of Rights and Freedom (right to secure against unreasonable search and seizure).

- Is there enough proof to justify the search?
- Is the search reasonable?
- Is the search carried out in a reasonable manner?

RCMP involvement and warrant may be required if there are not indicators of urgent risk. The RCMP will determine if there is a relevant history of weapons possession, use or violence.

- In cases of students, the school owns the locker dynamic and how it must be attended to in each incident—the school administration searches the student's locker, backpack, desk, cell phone and car.
- The RCMP owns the bedroom dynamic and will take the lead to determine the level of search required. It's important to examine the individual's bedroom and any other personal spaces such as the individual's internet history.
- Agency and organizations are owners of their property (vs. personal property e.g. purse).

Gathering Additional Information¹

Once assembled, the initial VTRA response team needs to determine a plan of action including identifying sources of data and delegating roles—for example; interviewing, background checks and notifying family.

Immediate data may be obtained from multiple sources including interviews and hard data. Interviewees and data sources should include:

- the person(s) who has raised the concern;
- potential target(s) or victim(s);
- witnesses;
- in cases of students – teachers and other school staff as applicable such as educational assistants, family-school liaison worker, bus driver and coach;
- peers;
- work colleagues;
- partner agency background checks including RCMP, mental health agencies, Children's Services, Family and Community Services;
- diaries and notebooks; and
- internet history.

1. At this stage, the VTRA Lead is responsible for the secure record storage and protected information sharing.

Interviewing the Threat Maker

When possible, interview the threat maker(s) of concern after the initial data is collected. Interview the person who reported the threat, interview potential targets or witnesses and complete background checks with RCMP and relevant partners. These will provide the interviewers with the comprehensive data needed to develop case-specific hypotheses and verbatim questions that can be asked in a strategic VTRA interview of the threat maker(s).

No more than two people should be present when interviewing the threat maker—one of whom must be a clinician or counselling team member. It is important to consider and explore all relevant aspects of the threat maker's life.

Determining Level of Risk

Following data collection, the VTRA team should come back together to collate data and discuss all relevant information regarding the threat.

Using the information gathered, engage in discussions to determine the level of risk. As a team, ask the following questions:

- What extent does the individual pose a threat to community safety?
- Does the individual pose a threat to him/herself, someone else (e.g. a family member) or the community?

RISK TO SAFETY IS MINIMAL:

Available information suggests the person is unlikely to carry out the threat or become violent. NOTE: Categorization of low risk doesn't imply no risk. Rather, it indicates the individual is at little risk for violence and monitoring the concern is appropriate.

- The threat is vague and indirect.
- Information contained within the threat is inconsistent, implausible, lacks detail or lacks realism.
- The threat is within the general range for typical baseline behaviour for the threat maker.

MEDIUM LEVEL OF CONCERN:

The threat could be carried out, although it may not appear entirely realistic. Violent action is possible.

- Threat is more plausible and concrete than a low-level threat. The threat maker is deemed to be at an elevated risk for violence.
- Wording in the threat and information gathered suggests some thought has been given to how the threat will be carried out—for example, a possible place and time.
- There is no clear evidence of planning such as weapon seeking. However, there are reasons to believe the threat is not empty because of verbal remarks or reported history.
- There are moderate or lingering concerns about the individual's potential to act violently.
- There is an increase in baseline behaviour.

HIGH LEVEL OF CONCERN:

There appears to be imminent and serious danger to the safety of others.

- The threat is specific and plausible. There is an identified target and the individual has the capacity to act out the threat.
- Information suggests concrete steps were taken towards acting out the threat. For example, the individual has acquired a weapon, practiced on a weapon or has had the victim under surveillance.
- Information suggests strong concern about the individual's potential to act violently.
- There is a significant increase in baseline behaviour.

Determining Next Steps

With the input of the VTRA team members, decide on a course of action including identifying the risk-reducing interventions that need to be put into place.

LOW TO MEDIUM LEVEL OF CONCERN:

- Create an intervention plan.
- The individual can likely be managed within the agency/school with appropriate monitoring and collaborative-based interventions.
- Contact the VTSP Lead Organization to advise of the outcome of the Stage 1 VTRA.

MEDIUM TO HIGH LEVEL OF CONCERN:

- A Stage 2 VTRA is needed.
- It's necessary to involve the relevant community partners in a multidisciplinary meeting.
- Implement any needed interventions to support the individual until the Stage 2 VTRA meeting takes place.
- Advise VTSP Lead Organization of elevation to Stage 2 VTRA if VTSP Lead Organization is not already aware or involved; VTRA Lead and VTSP Lead Organization work collaboratively to coordinate management moving forward.



Stage 2 VTRA

The focus for Stage 2 VTRA is a comprehensive risk evaluation and intervention planning by a multidisciplinary team. Members of various partner agencies will collaborate to gain a deeper understanding of the individual. The goal is to create a comprehensive intervention plan.

Preparing for a Stage 2 VTRA

- Review the individual's record and the information gathered by the initial VTRA response team.
- Consider any family concerns or legal flags that may be present such as consent, guardianship and/or pending criminal charges.
- If parents or guardians are involved:
 1. Explain the Stage 2 VTRA process indicating the goal is to create an intervention plan to support the person/student, family and school.
 2. Invite them to attend the multidisciplinary meeting.
 3. Ask if there are additional professional or family supports they would like to have at the meeting such as extended family, a private therapist or someone else. These individuals are required to sign confidentiality agreements.²
- Determine additional VTRA team members required for the Stage 2 meeting.
 - » If appropriate, additional members of the community may be added such as a family physician, private therapist, a community agency or another support person.
- Book a date and location for the Stage 2 meeting and ensure all participants are aware.
- Share any necessary VTRA-related documents with protocol partners, which should be reviewed prior to the meeting.

2. The confidentiality agreement template can be found in the VTSP Protocol document.

Stage 2 VTRA Meeting: A Step-By-Step Guide

- The VTRA Lead or VTSP Lead Organization chairs the Stage 2 VTRA meeting.
- Stage 2 planning and intervention documents are in Appendix 3.
- Begin with a welcome and introductions, with the chair noting attendees or circulating attendance sheet.
- Indicate the purpose of the meeting is “to gain a deeper understanding of the individual and the circumstances relating to the incident to create a comprehensive intervention plan that will support the individual, family and community.”
- Explain how open conversation provides the best information and understanding. Indicate the team is seeking multiple perspectives on the individual and many questions will be asked about home and/or school (if applicable).
- Assign the lead professional or agency for each risk enhancer identified to collectively address all areas of concerns identified during the Stage 2 VTRA.
- After the intervention plan is identified, review the level of risk and determine, as a group, whether the identified interventions are sufficient.
- Determine who will follow up with the family and agencies regarding the implementation of supports and monitor if interventions are successful.

Intervention Follow-up Meeting

- The VTRA Lead or VTSP Lead Organization is responsible for scheduling a brief follow-up meeting within four to eight weeks of the Stage 2 VTRA meeting.
- The purpose of the follow-up meeting is to review the intervention plan, reassess the level of risk and determine whether additional supports are needed.
- If necessary, make a plan for future follow-up meetings.

Supporting Those Who May Be Impacted

Crisis and Trauma Management

The VTSP Lead Organization and site-specific leads are responsible for ensuring any possible victims of the threat/event are identified and services are provided as necessary.

The circumstances of the threat/event will dictate how far reaching the intervention needs to be. The VTSP Lead Organization, in consultation with the site lead, should determine if crisis counselling or trauma follow up is needed to re-establish calm.

Additionally, consideration must again be given to any ripple effect or impact to the community or groups not directly connected to the situation at hand. Understanding that individuals are entitled to be as impacted by the transpiring events as they express they are, a broader response to acknowledge and mitigate trauma may be required.

The VTSP Protocol and specifically TES can guide the response to any impacts of trauma in the community.



Appendices

Appendix 1: Response Guides – Community and School-Based

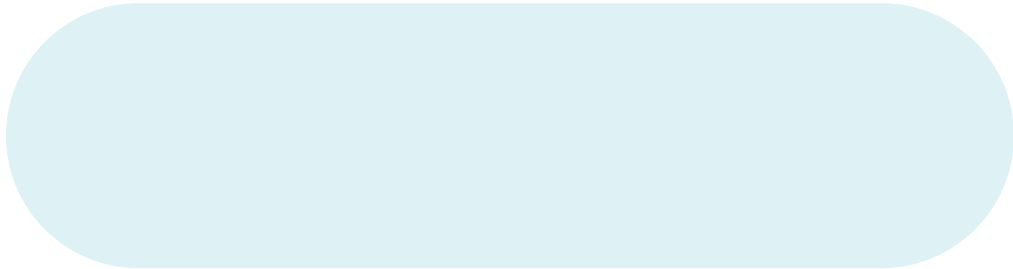
Community Response Guide

STEPS		ACTIONS
1	Secure safety and address any immediate risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If possible, limit access to possible weapons and monitor the person(s) of concern until police member of the team has been contacted for advice on how to proceed.
2	Inform agency VTRA lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform the VTRA Lead or the VTSP Lead Organization of a Stage 1 VTRA activation. They will direct the process or provide consultation on how to proceed.
3	Contact police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call a VTRA-trained police member and share initial data. Police member will determine if there is a history of weapons possession/use or violence noted in police accessible records.
4	Convene initial VTRA team and determine a plan for data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange a meeting of protocol members who will be involved in investigating this VTRA case (the investigation may be based out of the agency or school, depending on the situation). Before beginning interviews, the protocol team needs to determine a strategic plan for data collection (see Appendix 2), including who will interview the sources of data (all participants directly and indirectly involved), and who will examine hard data relevant to the case (e.g. school records, internet history, surveillance footage, etc.).
5	Data collection, including interview with threat maker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct interviews and examine other sources of data.
6	Family notification and interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once basic facts are established, notify family members of both the threat maker(s) and target(s) at the earliest opportunity, if applicable.
7	Stage 1 meeting review data and determine level of risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protocol members come back together to review all information collected. As a team, determine the level of risk and record it.
8	Decide on course of action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a team, develop a Stage 1 Intervention Plan with strategies to address all identified risk factors (see Appendix 2) If the threat is assessed to be moderate to high level of concern, advise the VTSP Lead that Stage 2 is required.
9	Communication and storage of plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a meeting with threat maker and family, if possible, to discuss the intervention plan. If moving to Stage 2, this will be a larger meeting with more community partners present. Upload the completed Stage 1 Report Form and any supporting documentation to the secure online platform.

School Administrator's Response Guide

STEPS		ACTIONS
1	Secure safety and address any immediate risk factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriately monitor and/or detain the student(s) of concern until the police member of the team is present. • Ensure the student(s) of concern does not have access to weapons—do not allow access to locker, backpack, coat or cell phone.
2	Check locker, backpacks, desk, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow school division procedures to search the threat maker's backpack, locker, desk, gym locker and other belongings. • Take photographs or copies of anything of concern found.
3	Contact police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call a VTRA-trained police member and share initial data. • Police member will determine if there is a history of weapons possession/use or violence noted in police accessible records.
4	Contact school division VTRA Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the school division VTRA Lead to advise of Stage 1 VTRA activation. They will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » provide consultation to the school team regarding how to proceed; » if needed, dispatch a member of central office VTRA team to assist; » help with conducting protocol partner background checks; and » ensure the superintendent is informed.
5	Determine interview plan and begin data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before beginning interviews, the VTRA team meets to determine a strategic plan for data collection (see Appendix 2) • Determine who will interview sources of data including all participants directly and indirectly involved. • Determine who will examine hard data relevant to the case such as school records, internet history and surveillance footage.
6	Clinician-led interview with threat maker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The clinical member uses the Stage 1 Report Form as an interview guide. • No more than two people should be present when interviewing the threat maker and one must be a clinical member.

STEPS		ACTIONS
7	Parent notification and interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once basic facts are established, notify guardians of both the threat maker(s) and target(s) at the earliest opportunity. Interview parents or guardians as part of the data collection process. The SRO or VTRA-trained police officer takes the lead on inquiring about the “bedroom dynamic.”
8	Stage 1 meeting review data and determine level of risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the Stage 1 Report Form as a guide, VTRA team members come back together to review all information collected. As a team, determine level of risk and record on the Stage 1 Report Form.
9	Decide on course of action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a team, come up with a Stage 1 Intervention Plan with strategies to address all identified risk factors (see Appendix 2) If the threat is assessed to be moderate to high level of concern, advise the VTSP Lead that Stage 2 is required.
10	Communication and storage of plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a meeting with threat maker and guardians to discuss the intervention plan. If moving to Stage 2, this will be a larger meeting with more community partners present. Upload the completed Stage 1 Report Form and any supporting documentation to the secure online platform.



1 – Details of the incident

2 – Attack-related behaviors

3 – Empty vessel

4 – Threat maker typology

5 – Target typology

6 – Peer dynamics (answers relevant to risk)

7 – Family dynamics (answers relevant to risk)

8 – Contextual factors (answers relevant to risk)

VTRA Stage 1 Intervention Plan

Site Response – Risk reducing interventions at school/work/community

Action taken:	
Intended target warned and family notified?	
Suicide risk assessment? Date completed:	Completed by:
Alert organizations and staff on a need-to-know basis. Details of notification:	
Increase monitoring for an identified period of time following the incident. Which of the following will be put in place: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daily or weekly check-in with (Title/Name):• Daily bag/belongings check by (Title/Name):• Increased supervision in these settings:• Modified daily schedule (e.g. late arrival and/or early dismissal):	
Identify precipitating/aggravating circumstances and determine what intervention(s) will be put in place to alleviate tension (for example, medication issues):	
Community-based services required? Identify any referrals that will be made (for example, drug and alcohol intervention, mental health services, family-school liaison worker, etc.):	

Family Response: Risk reducing factors at home and community

Family members will provide the following supervision and support:

Any referrals to outside services that the family will follow-up on?

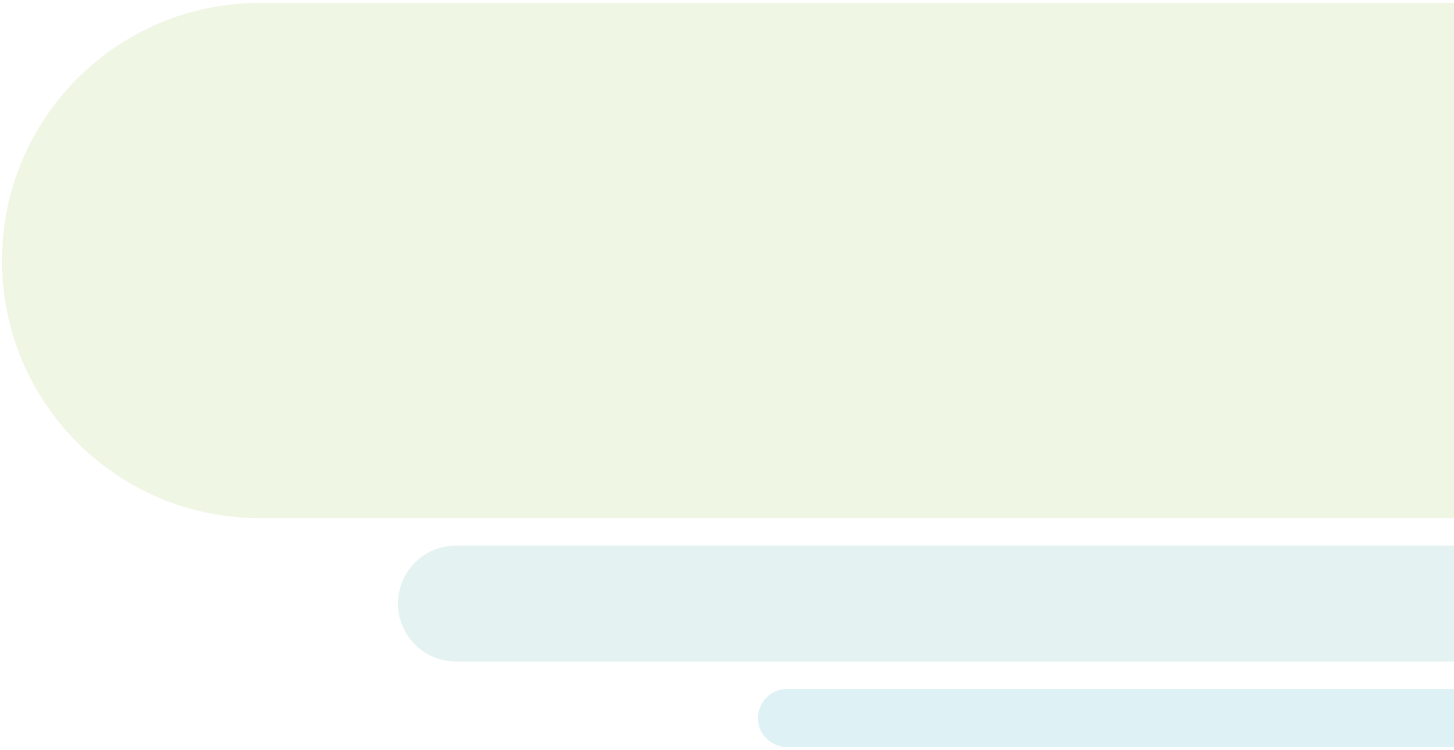
Evaluating Traumatic Community Impacts

Any specific groups impacted by the events that transpired?

Steps to support impacted parties:

Stage 1 Follow-up Plan

Plan for Follow-up
<p>The VTRA team (including family members) will monitor the intervention plan regularly and modify as appropriate. The team (including family members) will come back together to review plan and determine if interventions have successfully reduced the risk. Follow-up meeting(s) are planned for:</p>



Appendix 3: Stage 2 Intervention

VTRA Stage 2 Report Form

The focus for Stage 2 VTRA is a comprehensive risk evaluation and intervention planning by a multidisciplinary team. Protocol members/partners collaborate to gain a deeper understanding of the individual. The goal is to create a comprehensive intervention plan.

Individual:		DOB/Age:	
Org/School:			
Family names and phone numbers:			
Date of STAGE 1 VTRA:		Previous VTRAs?	
Key data from Stage 1 VTRA:			
Key interventions identified in Stage 1 VTRA:			
Name	Agency and role	Relationship with individual	

Stage 2 Data Gathered

Summary of assessments or agency interventions that resulted from Stage 1 VTRA (outcomes, diagnosis, recommendations and progress toward goals):

--

Current risk enhancers, supports still required (use the VTRA Intervention Planning Worksheet as a guide):

--

Stage 2 Intervention Plan (Action Items)

Partner Agency:

_____ will follow through on the following

Partner Agency:

_____ will follow through on the following

Partner Agency:

_____ will follow through on the following

Partner Agency:

_____ will follow through on the following

Partner Agency:

_____ will follow through on the following

Stage 2 Follow-up Plan

The VTRA team (including family members) will monitor the intervention plan regularly and modify as appropriate. The team (including family members) will come back together to review plan and determine if interventions have successfully reduced the risk. Follow-up meeting(s) are planned for:

