WELCOME!

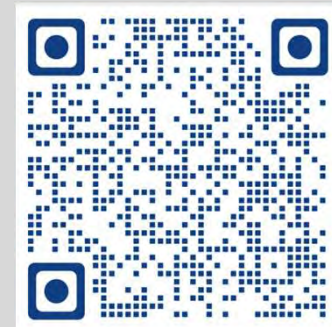**National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment**

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Structured Interview for Violence Risk Assessment

SIVRA-35 Certification Course

Agenda

1 Introduction
- Assessment Types
- VRA Process
- VRA Fundamental Components

2 Conducting an Effective Interview
- Preparing for the Interview
- Rapport Building and Active Listening
- Collecting Information
- Assessing Credibility
- Mitigating Bias

3 Using the SIVRA-35
- SIVRA-35
- Case Studies

Introduction

Note: Dangerousness and violence, from a student, faculty or staff member is difficult, if not impossible to accurately predict.

This training topic offers research-based techniques and theories to provide a foundational understanding and improved awareness of the potential risk.

The training or tool should not be seen as a guarantee or offer any assurance that violence will be prevented.

Introduction

This presentation contains graphic language and imagery.

Violence Risk Assessment Overview

- Assessment Types: VRAs vs. other assessments
- Fundamental Components: Risk/Protective Factors, Objectivity and Interview Techniques
- When to Conduct a VRA and Who is Best Suited?

Case Study: Freeman High School

Caleb Sharpe, 15 years old

- On September 13th 2017, Caleb flipped a coin that came up heads and he entered his school with an AR-15 and a handgun in a duffel-bag.

- The AR-15 jammed, and he used the handgun to shoot a fellow student, who was trying to stop the shooting. Caleb continued to shoot down the hall and then surrendered to a custodian.

- He told detectives he wanted to "teach everyone a lesson about what happens when you bully others."

Case Study: Freeman High School

- Around the time classes started at the high school, Caleb gave notes to several friends indicating plans to do "something stupid" that might leave him dead or in jail. One of those notes was reportedly passed on to a school counselor. He also bragged to several friends when he figured out the combination to his father's gun safe, and again when he learned to make bombs out of household materials.

- He acted out violent scenarios on his YouTube channel and spoke openly about his fascination with school shootings and notorious killers like Ted Bundy. He messaged a friend over Facebook asking if the friend could get him gasoline, tinfoil, and fuses. Harper replied "I said, 'No', and asked him why. He said, 'For a science experiment.' I said 'Why are you doing a science experiment?' and he said 'nevermind.'"

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Case Study: Freeman High School

- The day a Freeman High School student shot four students, killing one of them, was his <u>first day back</u> to school after he was suspended for writing notes that appeared to warn he might commit violence.

- Freeman Superintendent Randy Russell confirmed in an interview that the district knew of the warning notes passed out by the shooter and that the school responded by suspending him.

- When asked if the counselor called the parents, whether the school suspended the student and sent him for a **mental health evaluation**, Russel replied "That's what our protocol looks like and we followed it to a T."

http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2017/sep/16/freeman-high-school-suspended-shooter-after-note-d/

Case Study: Freeman High School

Takeaways:

- Avoid zero-tolerance policies
- Rely on violence risk assessments
- Establish a process for getting information to and receiving report from assessor
- Avoid a "one-and-done" approach – utilizing case management strategies to build connection and support

Assessment vs. Treatment

Assessment

- Short-term (1 – 2 meetings)

- May be conducted by a non-clinical or clinical provider

- Used to determine risk and protective factors

- Engagement may be voluntary or mandated

- Information/results are shared with referral source

Treatment

- Longer-term (about 5+ meetings)
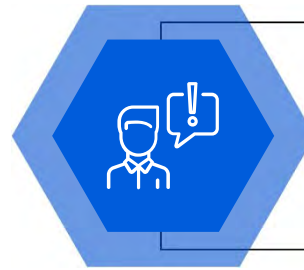
- Must be conducted by a licensed provider

- Used to address diagnosis and matters related to a mental health condition

- Engagement is voluntary in nature (unless court ordered)

- Information/progress are privileged in nature

Reminder: BITs can mandate assessments!

Types of Assessments

General Risk Assessment

Threat Assessment

Psychological Assessment

Violence Risk Assessment

Types of Assessments

General Risk Assessment

- Broadly utilized for a variety of situations and concerning behaviors
- Focuses on proactive approach, with interventions to lower risk and ease distress
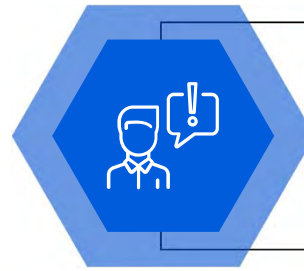
Threat Assessment

- Completed in response to explicit or veiled threat
- Focuses on details of threat, actionability and crisis response
- Often limited to determining likelihood of violence as related to specific threat

Types of Assessments

Psychological Assessment
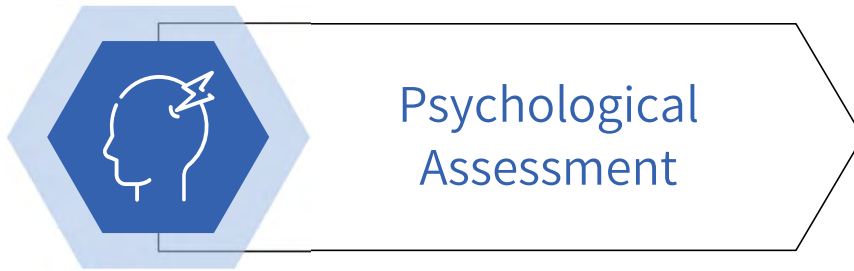
- Conducted by a trained, licensed clinician
- Focuses on determining diagnosis and treatment plan such as therapeutic intervention, medication, hospitalization, etc.

Violence Risk Assessment

- Focuses on determining potential violence or dangerousness toward a person, group or system
- Explores various risk factors and protective elements in comprehensive manner
- Not predictive, but rather an estimate of the factors that make it more or less likely the individual will engage in violence

VRA Process

Objective Risk Rubric

- **10x** NABITA Risk Rubric

- **25x** Violence Risk Assessment of the Written Word (VRAWW)

- **50x** Structured Interview for Violence Risk Assessment (SIVRA-35) or Non-clinical Assessment of Suicide (NAS)

NABITA Risk Rubric

D-SCALE
Life Stress and Emotional Health

DECOMPENSATING

▲ Behavior is severely disruptive, directly impacts others, and is actively dangerous. This may include life-threatening, self-injurious behaviors such as:
- ▲ Suicidal ideations or attempts, an expressed lethal plan, and/or hospitalization
- ▲ Extreme self-injury, life-threatening disordered eating, repeated DUIs
- ▲ Repeated acute alcohol intoxication with medical or law enforcement involvement, chronic substance abuse
- ▲ Profoundly disturbed, detached view of reality and at risk of grievous injury or death and/or inability to care for themselves (self-care/protection/judgment)
- ▲ Actual affective, impulsive violence or serious threats of violence such as:
  - ▲ Repeated, severe attacks while intoxicated; brandishing a weapon
  - ▲ Making threats that are concrete, consistent, and plausible
  - ▲ Impulsive stalking behaviors that present a physical danger

DETERIORATING

■ Destructive actions, screaming or aggressive/harassing communications, rapid/odd speech, extreme isolation, stark decrease in self-care
- ■ Responding to voices, extremely odd dress, high risk substance abuse; troubling thoughts with paranoid/delusional themes; increasingly medically dangerous binging/purging
- ■ Suicidal thoughts that are not lethal/imminent or non-life threatening self-injury
- ■ Threats of affective, impulsive, poorly planned, and/or economically driven violence
- ■ Vague but direct threats or specific but indirect threat; explosive language
- ■ Stalking behaviors that do not cause physical harm, but are disruptive and concerning

DISTRESSED

● Distressed individuals engage in behavior that concerns others, and have an impaired ability to manage their emotions and actions. Possible presence of stressors such as:
- ● Managing chronic mental illness, mild substance abuse/misuse, disordered eating
- ● Situational stressors that cause disruption in mood, social, or academic areas
- ● Difficulty coping/adapting to stressors/trauma; behavior may subside when stressor is removed, or trauma is addressed/processed
- ● If a threat is present, the threat is vague, indirect, implausible, and lacks detail or focus

DEVELOPING

◆ Experiencing situational stressors but demonstrating appropriate coping skills
◆ Often first contact or referral to the BIT/CARE team, etc.
◆ Behavior is appropriate given the circumstances and context
◆ No threat made or present

TRAJECTORY?

OVERALL SUMMARY

CRITICAL

In this stage, there is a serious risk of suicide, life-threatening self-injury, dangerous risk taking (e.g. driving a motorcycle at top speed at night with the lights off) and/or inability to care for oneself. They may display racing thoughts, high risk substance dependence, intense anger, and/or perceived unfair treatment or grievance that has a major impact on the students' academic, social, and peer interactions. The individual has clear target for their threats and ultimatums, access to lethal means, and an attack plan to punish those they see as responsible for perceived wrongs. Without immediate intervention (such as law enforcement or psychiatric hospitalization), it is likely violence will occur. There may be leakage about the attack plan (social media posts that say "I'm going to be the next school shooter" or telling a friend to avoid coming to campus on a particular day). There may be stalking behavior and escalating predatory actions prior to violence such as intimidation, telegraphing, and "test-runs" such as causing a disruption to better understand reaction time of emergency response.

ELEVATED

Behavior at the elevated stage is increasingly disruptive (with multiple incidents) and involves multiple offices such as student conduct, law enforcement, and counseling. The individual may engage in suicidal talk, self-injury, substance intoxication. Threats of violence and ultimatums may be vague but direct or specific but indirect. A fixation and focus on a target often emerge (person, place, or system) and the individual continues to attack the target's self-esteem, public image, and/or access to safety and support. Others may feel threatened around this individual, but any threat lacks depth, follow-through, or a narrowing against an individual, office, or community. More serious social, mental health, academic, and adjustment concerns occur, and the individual is in need of more timely support and resources to avoid further escalation. Conditional ultimatums such as "do this or else" may be made to instructors, peers, faculty, and staff.

MODERATE

Prior to this stage, conflict with others has been fairly limited. The hallmark of moderate is an increase in conflict with others through aggressive speech, actions, and mannerisms. They may become frustrated and engage in non-verbal behaviors or begin to post things on social media, put up posters around campus, or storm away from conversations. Stress, illness, lack of friends, and support are now becoming an increasing concern. The individual may be tearful, sad, hopeless, anxious, or frustrated. This may be caused by difficulty adjusting, dating stress, failure in class assignments, and/or increasing social isolation. If there is a threat or physical violence such as carelessly pushing someone out of their way while storming off, the violence is typically limited and driven by adrenaline and impulsiveness, rather than any deeper plan to hurt others.

MILD

The individual here may be struggling and not doing well. The impact of their difficulty is limited around others, with the occasional report being made to the BIT/CARE team out of an abundance of caution and concern rather than any direct behavior or threats. They may be having trouble fitting in, adjusting to college, making friends, or may rub people the wrong way. They alienate others with their thoughts or mannerisms, and there may be minor bullying and conflict. With support and resources, it is likely the individual will be successful adapting and overcoming obstacles. Without support, it is possible they will continue to escalate on the rubric.

BASELINE

Scale markers: 4 / 3 / 2 / 0/1

E-SCALE
Hostility and Violence to Others

EMERGENCE OF VIOLENCE

▲ Behavior is moving towards a plan of targeted violence, sense of hopelessness, and/or desperation in the attack plan; locked into an all or nothing mentality
▲ Increasing use of military and tactical language; acquisition of costume for attack
▲ Clear fixation and focus on an individual target or group; feels justified in actions
▲ Attack plan is credible, repeated, and specific; may be shared, may be hidden
▲ Increased research on target and attack plan, employing counter-surveillance measures, access to lethal means; there is a sense of imminence to the plan
▲ Leakage of attack plan on social media or telling friends and others to avoid locations

ELABORATION OF THREAT

■ Fixation and focus on a singular individual, group, or department; depersonalization of target, intimidating target to lessen their ability to advocate for safety
■ Seeking others to support and empower future threatening action; may find extremists looking to exploit vulnerability; encouraging violence
■ Threats and ultimatums may be vague or direct and are motivated by a hardened viewpoint; potential leakage around what should happen to fix grievances and injustices
■ There is rarely physical violence here, but rather an escalation in the dangerousness and lethality in the threats; they are more specific, targeted, and repeated

ESCALATING BEHAVIORS

● Driven by hardened thoughts or a grievance concerning past wrongs or perceived past wrongs; increasingly adopts a singular, limited perspective
● When frustrated, storms off, disengaged, may create signs or troll on social media
● Argues with others with intent to embarrass, shame, or shut down
● Physical violence, if present, is impulsive, non-lethal, and brief; may seem similar to affective violence, but driven here by a hardened perspective rather than mental health and/or environmental stress

EMPOWERING THOUGHTS

◆ Passionate and hardened thoughts; typically related to religion, politics, academic status, money/power, social justice, or relationships
◆ Rejection of alternative perspectives, critical thinking, empathy, or perspective-taking
◆ Narrowing on consumption of news, social media, or friendships; seeking only those who share the same perspective
◆ No threats of violence

TRAJECTORY?

CRITICAL

In this stage, there is a serious risk of suicide, life-threatening self-injury, dangerous risk taking (e.g. driving a motorcycle at top speed at night with the lights off) and/or inability to care for oneself. They may display racing thoughts, high risk substance dependence, intense anger, and/or perceived unfair treatment or grievance that has a major impact on the students' academic, social, and peer interactions. The individual has clear target for their threats and ultimatums, access to lethal means, and an attack plan to punish those they see as responsible for perceived wrongs. Without immediate intervention (such as law enforcement or psychiatric hospitalization), it is likely violence will occur. There may be leakage about the attack plan (social media posts that say "I'm going to be the next school shooter" or telling a friend to avoid coming to campus on a particular day). There may be stalking behavior and escalating predatory actions prior to violence such as intimidation, telegraphing, and "test-runs" such as causing a disruption to better understand reaction time of emergency response.

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3

Conducting a Violence Risk Assessment

WHEN

- When the individual has crossed the elevated threshold on the rubric.
- When you need more information related to the individual's likelihood of engaging in violence.
- After a clear understanding of the nature of the assessment has been established and any dual roles clarified.

WHO

- Anyone on the BIT with adequate training and knowledge.
- Someone with the ability to gather information and build rapport.
- Case managers, clinicians, conduct, etc., tend to be good at it.

Who Should Conduct a VRA

- No specific educational degree required

- Required training and expertise in using an objective risk assessment tool

- Competency in:
    - Conducting a VRA
    - Gathering information
    - Building rapport
    - Cultural issues

Mandating an Assessment

BIT/CARE

Team assessment reaches threshold for mandated assessment.

Engagement

If student does not engage, referral to conduct for failure to comply.

Conduct

Student is sanctioned to engage in assessment.

Conduct

Student required to participate in assessment after conduct violation.

Encouraging Compliance and Participation

- Adopt a position of care, safety, and collaboration
- Be transparent – explain the process and how the results will be used
- Deliver the mandated assessment letter in person
- Offer a warm introduction to the assessor

VRA Results: How are they used?

- VRA scores (Low, Medium, and High) guide the interventions from the BIT

- VRA scores DO NOT indicate whether a student should be suspended, remain on campus, or remain enrolled
  - These decisions lie within the student code of conduct or Title IX process
  - Although VRA scores can inform these procedures, the student's behavior must warrant a separation or restriction under either the code of conduct or Title IX
    - Interim or permanent suspension or expulsion
    - Emergency removal under Title IX

Components of a Good Violence Risk Assessment

Maintain an open mindset to encourage inquisitive, creative, and "outside the box" thinking

What can you do with a paperclip?

What can you do with a paperclip?

- Setting the clock in the car.
- Cleaning the Kuerig.
- Holding papers together.
- Making bra into halter type.
- Cleaning headphone jack.
- Picking a lock.
- Testing cake for doneness.
- Unlocking those doors with the little holes.
- Pushing reset buttons.
- Cleaning frosting tips and other small holes.
- Holding papers together
- Straighten it as a weapon

- Use it to be picked up by magnets
- To weigh down something
- To measure other things to be weighed (how many paper clips)
- To conduct electricity
- To be heated and sterilize wound
- To be sharpened and used as a dart
- With an entire pile you could throw them up in the air to make noise
- With one broken down into pieces you could make glitter
- Metal shavings to put into a gas tank
- Sharp metal pieces for a bomb

What can you do with a paperclip?

- To wrap around a pencil as a decoration
- To be magnetized on water to make a compass
- To deflate someone's tire
- To be the fulcrum in a slingshot
- To be froze in an ice cube to look at
- To be shaped into a dinosaur for art
- To be turned into letters to signal someone
- To be tied to together to make a really strong rope
- Made into a ball as a projectile to be shot

- As a bridge for a gerbil to walk across
- To act as a training tool for a group of threat assessment professionals
- To be turned into a question mark
- To be melted down entirely and made into a ring or jewelry
- To poke someone with

Developing a Violence Risk Estimate

Conduct a 1:1 interview

Weigh Risk & Protective Factors

Gather Collateral Information

Consider Context

Conduct an effective 1:1 interview to gather robust information

Use an objective tool to weigh the factors that increase AND reduce risk

Holistically gather background information, exploring all aspects of the person

Consider the context in which the dangerous or threatening behavior occurred

Conducting an Effective Interview

- Preparing for the Interview
- Rapport Building and Active Listening
- Collecting Information
- Assessing Credibility

Preparing for the Interview

01   **Enivronment Considerations**

How can we create an environment that promotes an effective interview?

02   **Interviewer Considerations**

What can the interviewer(s) in the room do to facilitate an effective interview?

03   **Content Considerations**

How can the interviewer prepare the content in order to conduct an effective interview?
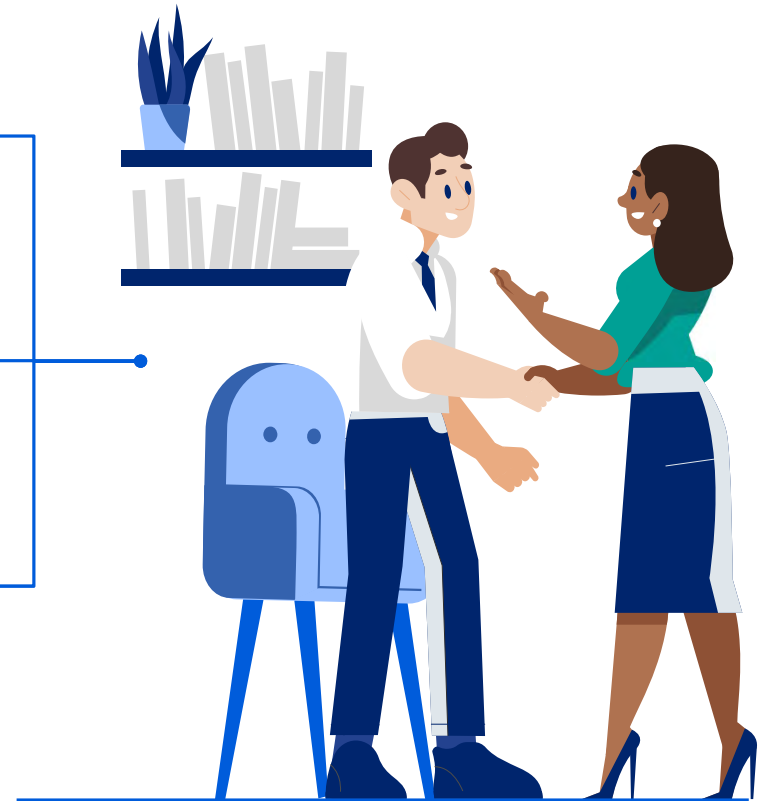
Environment Considerations

01 Timing
Identify the best time of day for the interview, considering how long it will take, your schedule, and the student's schedule. Allow for time after the interview to process/score with the team.

02 Room Location
Where on campus is the best location for the interview? Consider the implied message of the location, safety, accessibility, etc.

03 Room Setup
How can you arrange your room in way that takes into account comfortability, safety, and functionality?

04 Advisor or Support Person
Consider how you would respond if a student requests an advisor, support person, lawyer, etc. to be in the room with them.

Interviewer Considerations
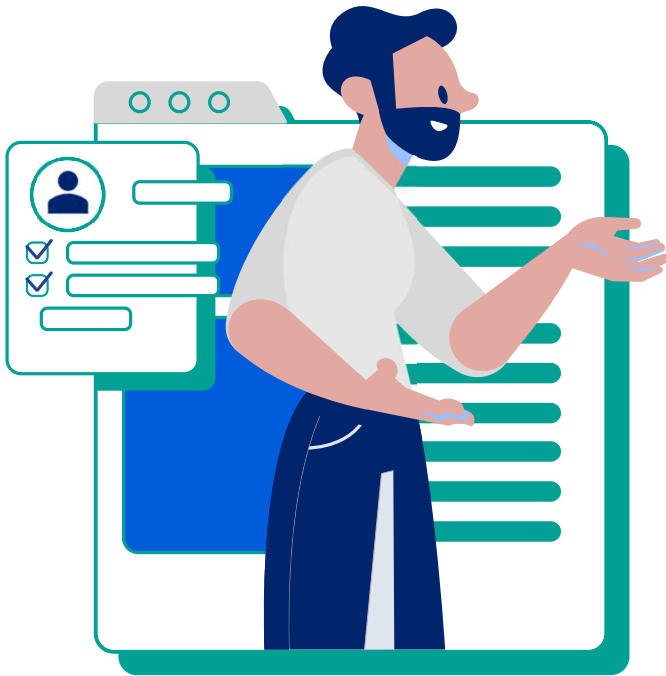
Presentation — Consider attire - professional attire, more casual, uniform, badge, etc.

One vs. Two — How many interviewers? If one, how will you ensure content is documented well? If two, what is the role of each and how can you create a comfortable environment?

Documentation — Will you record or take notes? How will records be stored and shared?

Introduction — Consider how you will introduce yourself and explain your role at the institution and in the interview.

Content Considerations
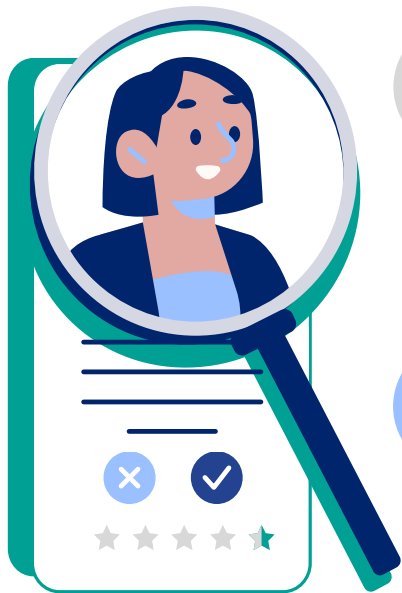
Review Materials

Review the incident report and other collateral information.

SIVRA-35

Prepare questions to address the 35 risk factors but be flexible to respond to the conversation.

Disclosure

Decide how much you will share about what you already know.

Questions

Consider how you will respond to questions like, "Who reported me?" or "Am I in trouble?"

Rapport Building & Active Listening
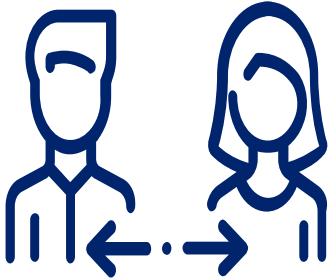
Helping Skills: Building Rapport
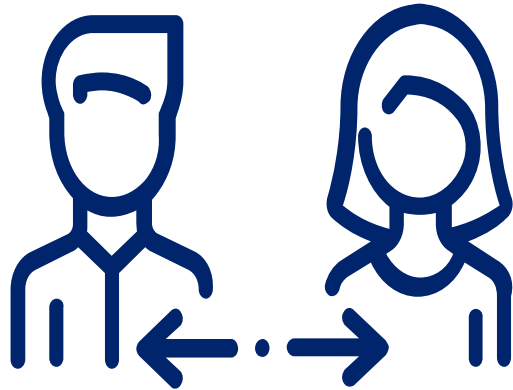
- "A close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well."

- Replace the word rapport with connection. How do you build a connection with someone?

Approaches to Rapport Building

Environmental — Office decorations, appearance, flags, banners, front lobby brochures, etc.

Behaviors — Kind gestures. Offer water, coffee, tissues, etc.

Mutual Ground — Look for commonalities, Find places to agree rather than argue.

Self-Disclosure — Verbal or through context clues.

Authenticity — Demonstrate empathy and genuineness.

Active Listening

An interactive process intended to assist the speaker and listener in understanding one another.

- Communicates understanding
- Promotes a positive relationship
- Encourages sharing

Helping Skills: Active Listening

Step One

Attend the individual with "attending" behaviors

Step Two

Think about the message

Step Four

Start the process again

Step Three
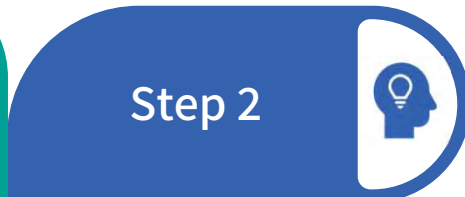
Demonstrate understanding using a sub-skill response

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

Step 4

Active Listening

Active Listening Sub-skill Responses

Restate/Reframe: Helps validate that you are listening and positions back to them what they have just told you.

- So you've tried completing the petition for a late withdrawal, but you were told you need a letter of support from a counselor first. Tell me more…
- I hear you saying that you and your friends used to be really close but lately you haven't been spending very much time together and it seems like they are ignoring you. What has this been like….
- So you've reached out to your RA already about the room change but you're frustrated about the steps you need to take to get the process started. Help me understand your frustration…

Active Listening Sub-skill Responses

Reflecting Statements: Help focus the speaker on the feelings behind what they're saying. Uses slightly different language and encourages the student to reflect and expand.

- It sounds like you're feeling overwhelmed by everything you have going on.
- What I'm hearing is that you feel disappointed and left out because your friends seem to be ignoring you when you used to be so close.
- It seems like it is frustrating for you that the process for a room change has been unclear.

Collecting Information

Collecting Information

- Understand an "interview" versus an "interrogation"
  - An interview is a conversation designed to elicit information in a non-accusatory manner
  - Shifting to an interrogation approach should not be done lightly; you cannot go back – not recommended

- What are the goals of questioning?
  - Learn the facts
  - Establish a deeper understanding
  - Understand each party's perception of what happened

- NOT the goals of questioning:
  - Curiosity
  - Chasing the rabbit into Wonderland

Questioning Tips

TO DO

✓ Have a purpose for asking every question.

✓ Be sure to ask a question, not make a speech.

✓ Listen carefully and adapt follow-up questions.

✓ Keep questions clear and concise.

✓ Seek to clarify terms and conditions that can have multiple meanings or a spectrum of meanings such as "fight sometimes," "drunk," "smoke a little," etc.

Questioning Tips

NOT TO DO

Don't be accusatory, judgmental, or argumentative. ⊗

Avoid compound, multiple choice, and leading questions. ⊗

Don't make evaluative statements like, "that's too bad," "I'm glad you said that," etc. ⊗

Avoid moving toward behavior change, suggesting referrals, or correcting language. ⊗

Be cautious with questions that invite parties to second-guess their actions ("why" questions), as this may be perceived as blaming. ⊗

Question Considerations

- **What are the critical issues?**

- **What do I need to know?**

- **Why do I need to know it?**

- **What is the best way to get the information?**

Questioning Guidelines

Take the referral from start to finish through a process of broad to narrow questions and issues that need to be addressed.

Prepare an outline of your questions in advance

- Ask questions about the allegations/referral and the concerning behavior/statements
- Focus on areas of critical issues or gaps in information
- Drill down on details and specific SIVRA-35 items
- Review your questions before ending interview

Questioning Guidelines

Following vs. Leading

Avoid offering leading questions and instead follow the flow of the conversation.

Explaining vs Defending

Structure the questions to provide an opportunity for the individual to explain their perspective rather than having to defend their actions.

Clarifying vs. Confronting

Focus on clarifying discrepancies rather than confronting misleading information or lies.

Curiosity vs Suspicion

Be curious, open, and exploratory in the phrasing of questions rather than suspicious and accusatory.

?

Question Considerations

Open Questions

- Questions that require a lengthier explanation and have no right answer
- Used to explore and understand
- Promotes reflection and insight development
- Helpful for gaining insight and building rapport

Closed Questions

- Questions that can be answered with "yes", "no", or a short phrase
- Used to gather specific information
- Helpful in risk assessment
- Not helpful for rapport building or exploratory efforts

Effective Questioning techniques

Open-ended Questions

Probing Questions
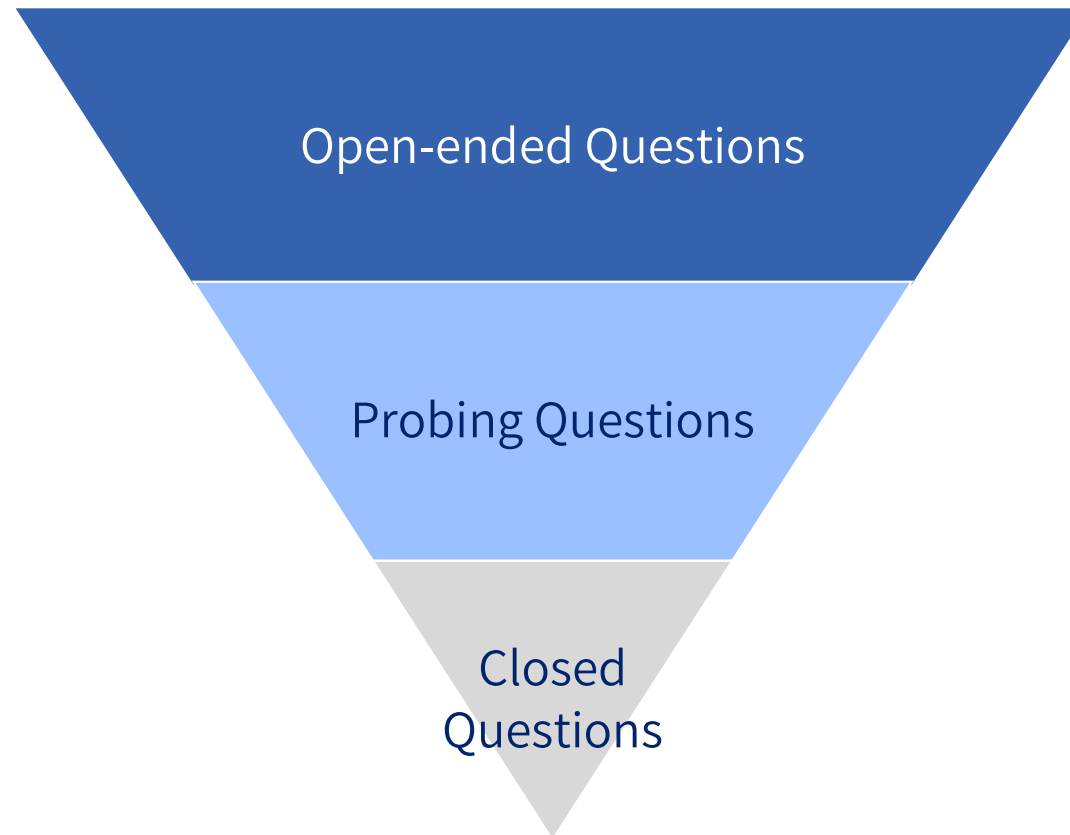
Closed Questions

Effective Questioning techniques

- Open-ended questions:
  - Invite a narrative
  - Encourage reflection and elaboration
  - Helpful in exploring the situation

- Examples:
  - "Tell me what has been going on for you…"
  - "How would you like to see them pay?"
  - "How would you describe…"

Open-ended Questions

Probing Questions

Closed Questions
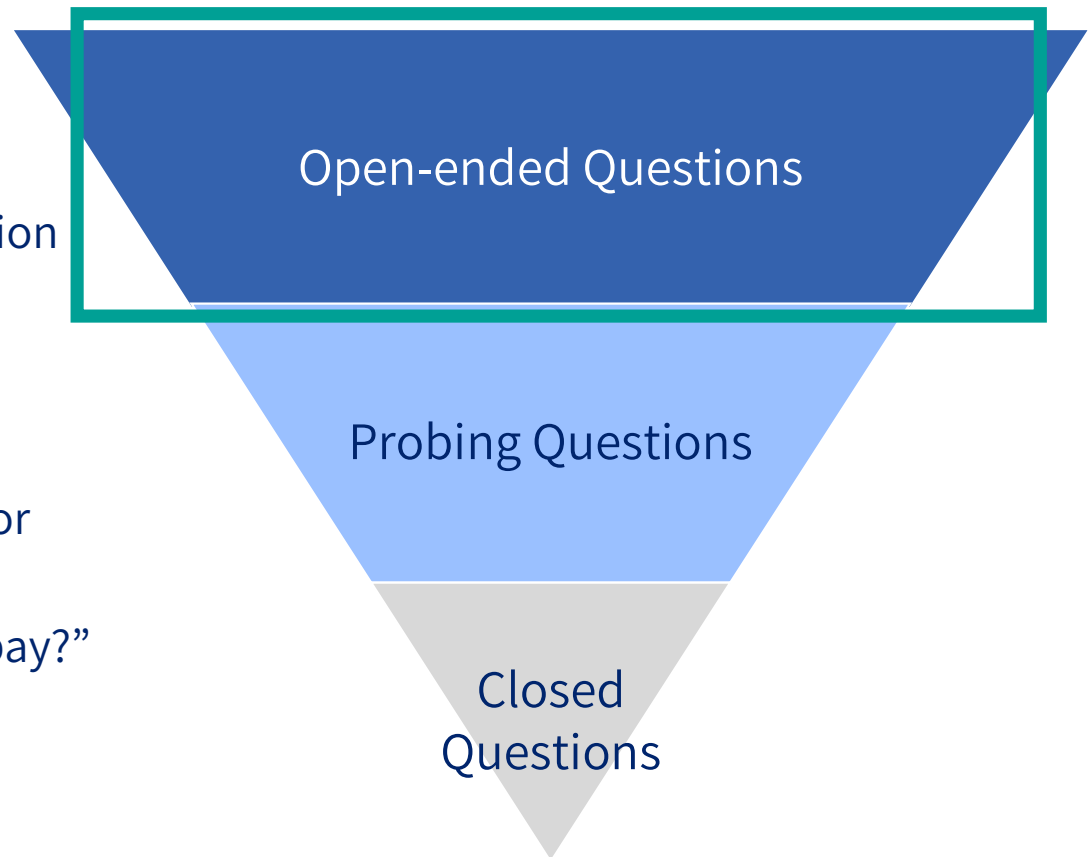
Effective Questioning techniques

- Probing Questions:
  - Flesh out extra details
  - Explore motivation, context, and more in-depth information
- Examples:
  - "Tell me more about…"
  - "You mentioned ____, can you give me an example?"
  - "How often are you…"
  - Scaling questions

Open-ended Questions

Probing Questions
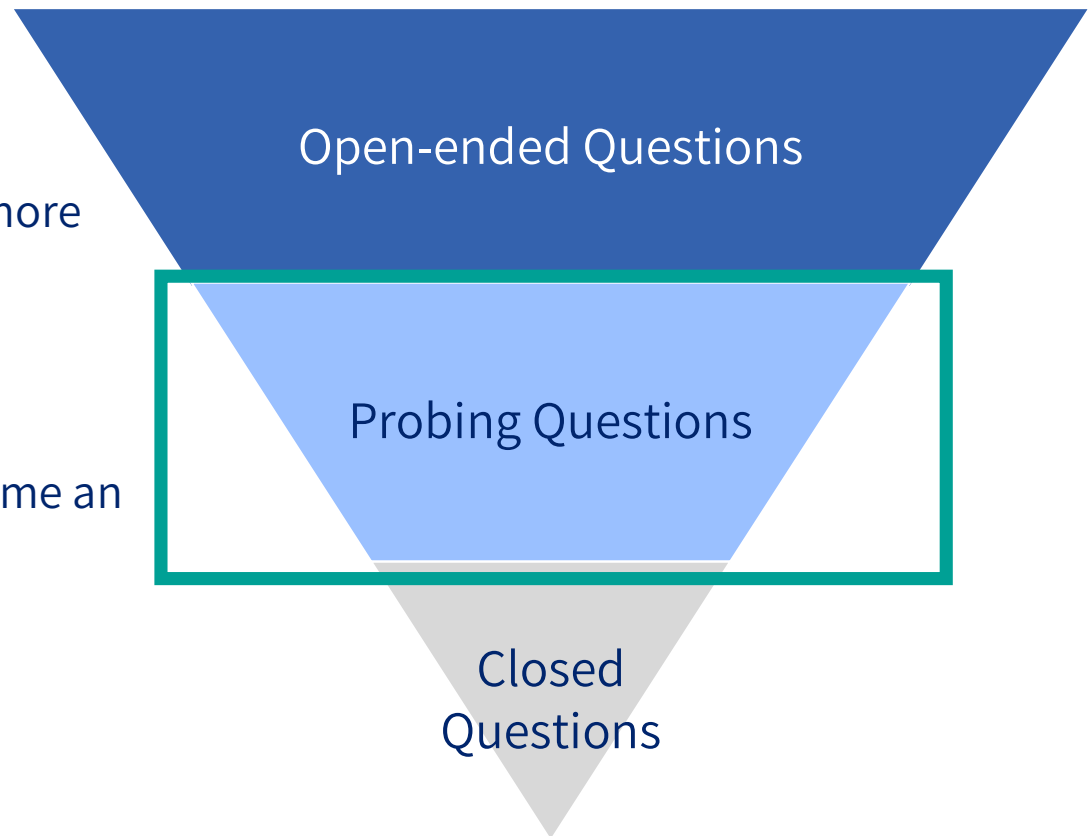
Closed Questions

Effective Questioning techniques

- Closed questions:
  - Establish and reestablish specific risk
  - Require specific, yes or no answers
  - Clarify discrepancies

- Examples:
  - "Are you thinking of killing or harming …?"
  - "Have you thought about how you harm them?"
  - "Do you have access to…?"

Open-ended Questions

Probing Questions

Closed Questions
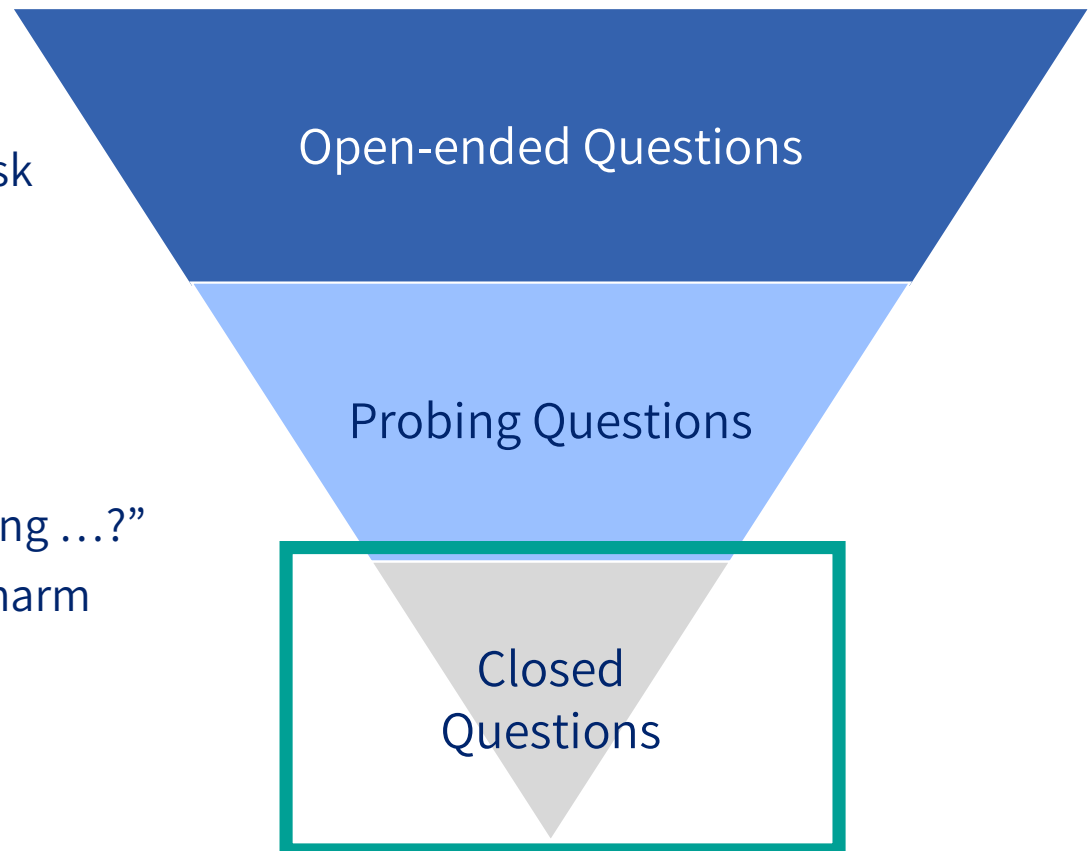
Sample Questioning Sequence

Introduction

- Used to develop rapport
- Inform re: the process
- Establish baseline communication expectations
- Reinstatement of the context

Transfer Control

- Interviewee directs the conversation
- Active participation
- Volunteer information

Probe

- Identify central issues
- Explore stressors
- Explore triggering events
- Explore protective factors
- Learn about access to treatment

Gather Specifics

- Confirm Information
- Focus on specific, clear answers
- Thoughts of harm to others
- Plans
- Means
- Intent
- Specified target
- Other risk factors

Assessing Credibility

Assessing Credibility

- ✓ Avoiding eye contact
- ✓ Looking up and to the left
- ✓ Touching or covering mouth
- ✓ Fidgeting
- ✓ Pupil dilation

What is Credibility?

- Accuracy and reliability of information

- "Credible" is not synonymous with "truthful"

- Memory errors, evasion, misleading may impact

- Primary factor is corroboration

- Avoid too much focus on irrelevant inconsistencies

- Source + content + plausibility

- Trauma-informed approach should be consistent

Credibility

- Inherent Plausibility
  - "Does this make sense?"
  - Be careful of bias influencing sense of "logical"
- Motive to Falsify
  - Do they have a reason to lie?
- Corroboration
  - Aligned testimony and/or physical evidence
- Past Record
  - Is there a history of similar behavior?
- Demeanor (use caution!)
  - Do they seem to be lying or telling the truth?

Enforcement Guidance on Vicarious Employer Liability for Unlawful Harassment by Supervisors

EEOC (1999)

Assessing Credibility

1 Repeat and reformulate questions

2 Evaluate congruency

3 Triangulate information
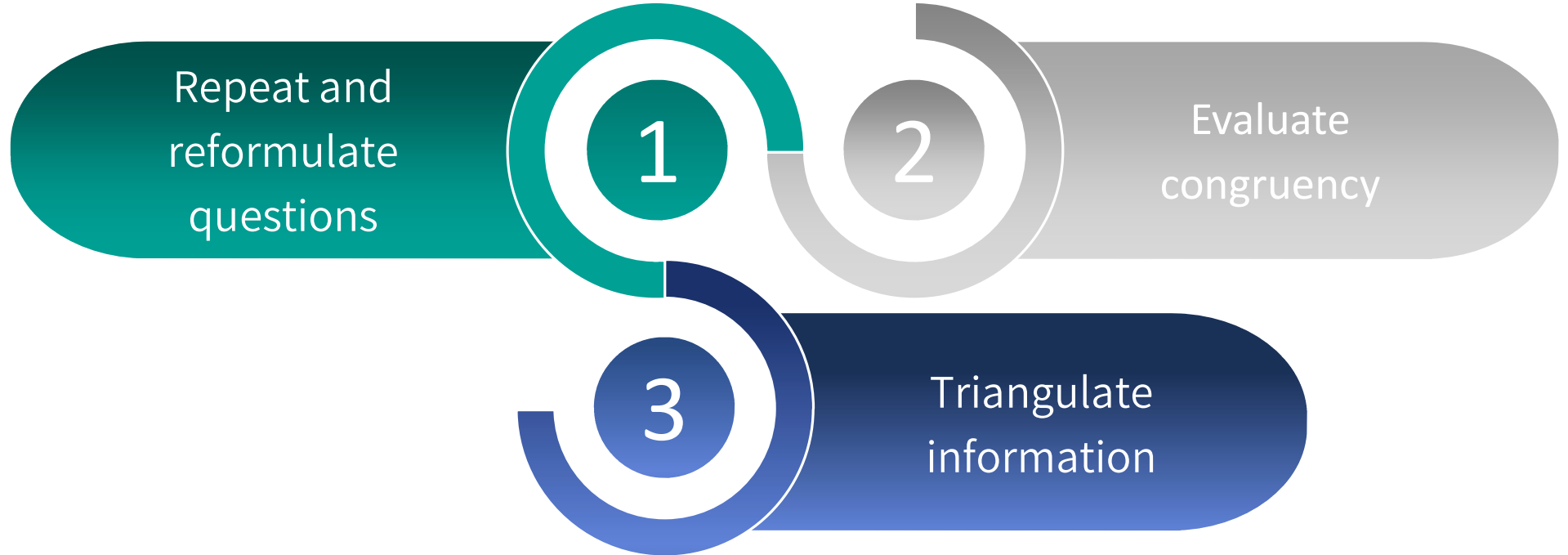
Gathering Collateral Information

- Common sources of additional information

- How to gather additional information

Gather Background

Incident Report

Referral or incident report detailing current events that prompted VRA

Relevant BIT/Conduct History

Background information from BIT, case management, conduct, or other disciplinary files

Collateral Sources

Information from parents, advisors, professors, etc.

Gathering Background Considerations

- Generally, FERPA allows you to do this.

- Consider how much you will share with the collateral information source and how you will answer any questions they might have.

- Decide who would be the best person to have the conversation.

- Establish a plan – general information/perspective gathering, cross-checking information for consistency/credibility, obtaining additional/new information?
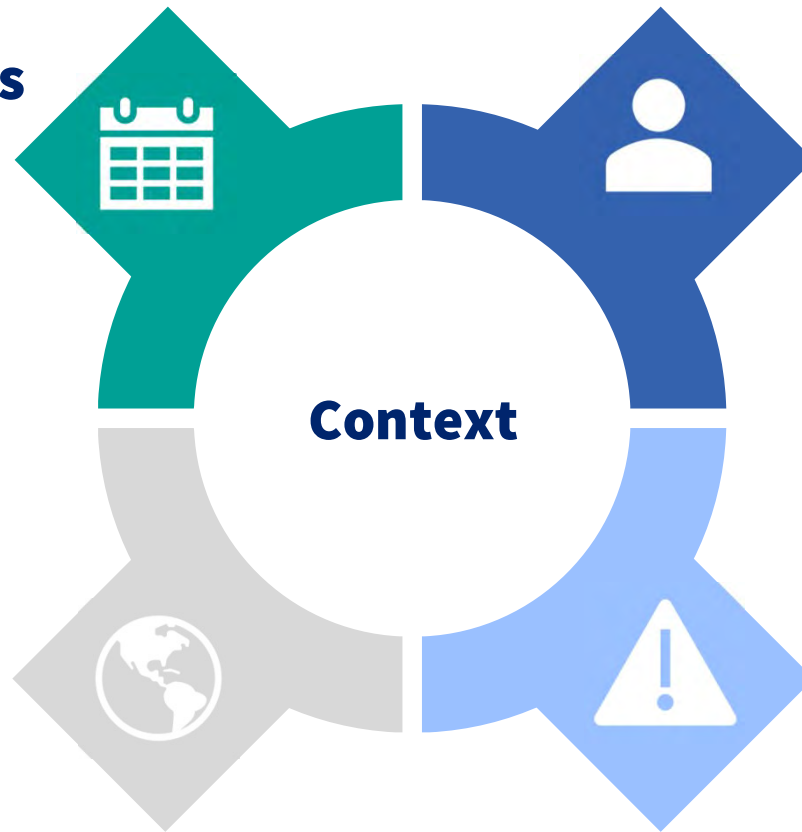
Consider the Context

- Bias Considerations

Consider the Context

Precipitating Events
What might have precipitated the behavior or threat?

Individual
What do we know about the individual and their baseline behavior?

Context

Cultural
What cultural factors might be at play?

Environmental
What environmental factors contributed to the event?

What are Bias and Prejudice?

Bias

- A preference or tendency to like or dislike
- A cognitive process
- A thought process developed over time through repeated personal experience
- Implicit or explicit
- Formed from stereotypes, societal norms, cultural experience, expectations of the people around you

Prejudice

- A preconceived opinion that is not based on fact, reason, or actual experience
- Can be classified as cognitive prejudice, affective prejudice, and conative prejudice
- Can include injury or damage as a result of some judgment or action of another in disregard of one's legal rights

Common Forms of Bias & Prejudice within Violence Risk Assessments

Gender Bias/Prejudice	1	Showing favoritism toward one gender identity/expression over another.
Racial Bias/Prejudice	2	Showing favoritism toward one race over another or associating negative traits toward one race over another.
Halo Effect	3	The tendency for a person's positive qualities, physical appearance, and general attractiveness to influence a positive impression of their character.
Horn Effect	4	The tendency for a person's negative qualities, disheveled appearance, and poor presentation to influence a negative impression of their character.

Common Forms of Bias & Prejudice within Violence Risk Assessments

Experience Bias 5 — The tendency to interpret a situation, behavior, or comments based on an individual's own experience.

Affinity Bias 6 — The unconscious tendency to gravitate toward those who have similar identities to us.

Confirmation Bias 7 — Interpreting ambiguous evidence to support one's own opinions or existing position.

Availability Bias 8 — Relying on information that is readily and easily available to form opinions.

Impacts of Bias within VRA

- Affects assessor's perception of interviewee and witnesses
- Impacts the ability to build rapport, connect, and create safe/neutral spaces for all participants throughout the assessment
- Creates tension in the process and in some cases a hostile environments
- Creates risk of *flawed* information collecting and questioning of participants
- Written reports become subjective and include biased language
- Presents moments for assumptions not based on evidence
- Presents risk of discriminatory actions/behaviors toward parties
- Ability to assess, prevent, and remedy safety concerns diminished
- Reticence to ask needed questions, pursue information, or individuals who should be questioned

Mitigating Bias, Prejudice in VRA

- Establish a process for self-recusal
- Recommend team-based approach to interpretation of information and scoring of SIVRA-35
  - Strategy meetings
  - Debrief after interview
  - Team scoring
  - Report review
  - Insulation against internal/external pressures
- Allow parties the opportunity to challenge assessor
  - Replacement of personnel
  - Redo portions of assessment when needed
  - Anticipate questions about assessor's credentials/bias
  - When bias is disqualifying, fix it right away. Don't let it fester.

Bias/Prejudice Response Strategy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bq_xYSOZrgU

Using an Objective Tool to Weigh the Risk and Protective Factors

- SIVRA-35