



Preliminary ALERT

Terrorist Attacks Las Vegas – Edmonton – Marseille

Scope:

This ALERT will focus on the emotional impact of these current attacks and their implications for the educational community: students, staff, and parents. This is a Preliminary Alert as we are collaborating with a number of VTRA colleagues across North America before releasing counsel regarding the current dynamics of high profile hate-related international violence and terrorism in North America and beyond.

Traumatic Impact – Variables to Consider:

A priority at this time is instilling a feeling of internal control for those who feel helpless among us.

Educators and Parents in general may feel more of the weight of these attacks than many students. Some students are so inundated with online images and “stories” that unless it directly involves them, or those they know, they are not always generating symptoms. Adults may be more impacted by these traumatic events because we are flooded contextually (with images of the weekend attacks) while our children and students are being exposed to these types of images regularly. Nevertheless, **we have seen significant responses from some students** as well.

There are many adults and students who are deeply troubled by these attacks for a variety of reasons. Variables that would contribute most to generating or intensifying a traumatic response are:

1. **Proximity to Ground Zero** - In Canada that would be the Edmonton Region and the entire Province of Alberta. The more a person caught within the Impact Zone can “identify with the location” because they live or lived there or have visited there will increase symptom development.
2. **Regional Travel Patterns** - We have already noted that there is a more pronounced impact to the Mandalay Bay shootings in the Western part of Canada than the East due to level of familiarity with Las Vegas. Many Westerners have been to Las Vegas, while from Eastern Provinces many Canadians are more familiar with Boston, New York and Florida as travel destinations. Thus, the Pulse Nightclub shootings had more of an impact on the East.

3. **Overlapping Impact Zones-** In the Canadian context the Edmonton attacks have had the most effect on individual anxiety as it resembles the European-style attacks of late where a vehicle is used as the dominant weapon of choice and most people have access to a vehicle. What the Las Vegas shooting has done is intensify an already fearful Canadian community that now we have become a 'justifiable target' for international terrorists.
4. **Fear of the Unknown-** With growing multiculturalism in Canada the fear that 'someone who looks or acts different from me is a risk to me' will be exacerbated.
5. **Fear of the Known-** Serious violence is evolutionary and many students, staff, parents, and others do have at least one person they are concerned about. Recalling a conversation or seeing a post that caused them to pause may now be plaguing some individuals as they struggle with whether to tell or not. Under reaction is still the biggest problem we deal with.

October 2, 2017 Social Media Scan of Select Canadian Cities

For the first time prior to releasing an E-Alert we had one of our Social Media Analyst from Safer Schools Together do a scan of how young people are reacting to the multiple terrorist attacks over the past weekend. The data is consistent with the information provided above. See the qualitative brief provided below.

I looked across some West Coast and East Coast cities in Canada to see what youth are feeling towards the recent terror attacks in Edmonton and Las Vegas.

- **The West has been a lot more vocal than the East about the events. The East are giving prayers and condolences, but not much more than that.**
- **The biggest theme talked about is gun control. Lots of students who tweeted or posted about gun control want guns to be banned in the U.S.**
- **Students are angry that the Vegas shooter is not a "terrorist" but rather a "lone gunman".**
- **Some are feeling overwhelmed with all the major events this year. They mention all the fires here in Canada, the major hurricanes, earthquakes, and terrorist attacks around the world and that they feel helpless.**
- **Others are criticizing the school system saying we should be learning about the events now instead of what has happened in the past.**
- **Students in the Edmonton Region are in an elevated state of concern. All the points above are more frequent among students there.**

The following are a few tweets taken from different areas in Canada that illustrate these findings.

"Don't think I can handle any more of this hate. This world is falling apart right before our eyes."

"The world is a f....d up place rn [right now]. It's crazy that we study historical events like these in school, never thinking about what's going on rn"

"People are in crisis' right now, and we're studying WWI and WWII without concern for our current political climate"

"I'm scared of this planet right now. :(Vegas obviously but Edmonton today too? I thought Canada was off limits."

Strategic Interventions - Points to Consider:

1. Individuals closest to Ground Zero and others in the Impact Zone most struck with fear and hopelessness need to be grounded to a world they have control over. In these cases, the macro perspective of “what is wrong with the world and how do we fix it?” is too great. Instead the focus should be on micro interventions and realities such as emphasizing safety where you are right now:
 - a. Make sure families are wrapping around overwhelmed children and youth.
 - b. Expect a little regressive behaviour.
 - c. Restate to students and staff our school safety protocols.
 - d. In higher anxiety schools and communities have the School Resource Officers make an increase of “relaxed” appearances.
 - e. Monitor media and social media exposure and show an interest in what students are seeing and posting themselves.
 - f. Be prepared to engage in impromptu child and youth initiated conversations.
 - g. Model calmness.
 - h. Be visible. School personnel intentionally connecting with students reduces anxiety.
 - i. Students may be gathering more after school hours to maintain a sense of connection. Leaving the school open, for as long as possible, during this critical period will contribute to lowering anxiety.
2. As noted in the above “brief”, the more a person can identify with the site the more it can increase symptom development. Individuals who feel connected to these events due to proximity or because they have been there in the past should be encouraged to talk if that is what they are doing anyways. Be mindful of the “constructive use of self” which denotes that adults sharing how surreal all this trauma is to us is appropriate so the student does not feel like they are the only ones shocked and troubled by these events. After they vent you may need to take them back to the elements of point number one. The link below is a good brief resource for all professionals.

<https://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Guidelines-Talking-to-Kids-About-Tragedies.pdf>

3. Parents and caregivers may need to be reminded that a child who appears to be overreacting may in fact be so overwhelmed with personal issues that the societal anxiety has simply “pushed them over the edge”. This is an important time to have “meaningful conversations” about resolvable issues adults may have been avoiding, to do so now would bring relief to their child. Also, prompting the child’s favorite aunt, uncle, brother, sister, grandparent, etc. to make contact can help to increase that sense that at least “we are all right!”
4. Fear of the unknown and fear of what students and others may know but are not telling are constant dynamics we deal with in Violence Threat Risk Assessment. “The biggest problem we deal with in the aftermath of high profile violence is under reaction to often blatant indicators that an individual is moving on a pathway to violence.” As such, we have reattached the quick reference VTRA Sheet we sent out at the beginning of the year as a reminder. Students, staff and parents need to be reminded that through our multiagency VTRA collaborations we know how to assess risk and intervene – They just need to tell someone!

Conclusion:

A formal E- Alert will follow shortly as we gain clarity on new trends related to applications of VTRA but as a reminder:

1. We are in the beginning of a minimum of a two-week Critical Period. However, because of the number of overlapping Impact Zones; the depth of loss and trauma in Las Vegas and social media this impact will probably span the month of October before abating.
2. The more a troubled individual caught within the Impact Zones of these tragedies can identify with the aggressors, the more it will increase symptom development.
3. Baseline Behaviour, including Digital Baseline Behaviour is still the most important variable if there is evidence of a shift or increase.

Sincerely,

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Other Resources:

<http://www.edutopia.org/article/7-ways-calm-young-brain-trauma-lori-desautels>

http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/csts_sense_of_safety.pdf

http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/helping_youth_after_community_violence_educators.pdf

http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/parents_guidelines_for_helping_teens_after_the_recent_attacks.pdf

http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/talking_to_children_about_the_shooting.pdf

http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/tips_for_parents_media_final.pdf



5 VTRA TIPS

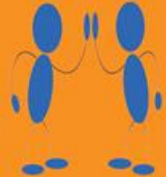
for Proactively Supporting At-Risk Students

1 Meet with your VTRA Team before school begins.



Start the new year with a “connection plan” for at-risk students who have previously been assessed or who begin school with high anxiety. In a truly open system, we want information from all adults involved with our high-risk students. Including the full team in the conversation early promotes one of the key fundamentals of VTRA work: multi-dimensional, collaborative information gathering.

2 Visibly connect early and often.



Ensure at-risk students are connected to a healthy adult in the school community. We do this naturally but we can be intentional in planning this. Who are your “empty vessel” students and how can we connect with them?

3 Ask: Who would a student go to if they need someone to talk to?

Children feel safe when they know the adults at school take charge of safety. One of the most powerful things a principal can do is ask a student directly: “Who would you talk to if you needed help?” Not only is the answer important, but by asking, you’re demonstrating that the most formal authority in the school is CARING.



4 Connect with community agencies.

The best prevention is engagement with our partners, to come to an understanding of how to activate the protocol. Violence, bullying, and threats of violence are not just school issues. Community ownership and engagement leads to multidimensional assessments.

5 Engage parents and community in a VTRA conversation.

Your first parent advisory meeting or welcome back evening is an opportunity for a candid conversation on how the VTRA protocol fosters safety. Explain the “fair notice” letter so parents know threats will be taken seriously. Explain how parents are key players in the process. VTRA is not something being done to them; it’s a process done with them for the safety of their child and in support of their family.

Let's talk.



Source: [Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response](#)