

Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) Level 1

Facilitator(s):	Bonnie Randall
Date(s):	<i>This is a multi-day event.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day 1: Oct 25, 2023 (9:00 am to 4:00 pm) • Day 2: Oct 26, 2023 (9:00 am to 4:00 pm)
Cost:	(includes lunch, which is not prepared in a nut/gluten-free environment)
Location:	Edmonton (Fantasyland Hotel) 17700 - 87 Avenue
Session Code:	24-IE-003

About this Learning Opportunity

Level One Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA)
Overview and Course Outline

The North American Center for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (NACTATR) Model is referred to as Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA). It is a broad Model that draws from a number of different disciplines that transcends the early focus of practitioners on individual pathology only, and instead, includes our pioneering work on the “dynamics of violence”. It builds on the early United States Secret Service research around Threat Assessment (TA) where they studied individuals who were moving on a pathway of violence towards a single target (e.g. political figure) which they called “targeted violence”. The VTRA Model also enhances the field of General Violence Risk Assessment (RA) which is often centered on violence prediction and the process of trying to determine if a person of concern may pose a risk of violence to members of society in general.

However, if you ask most clinicians not trained in VTRA what the difference between TA and RA is, they will say “nothing” or “I don’t know” or “aren’t they the same thing”. What is referred to as Stage I VTRA (“data collection and immediate risk reducing interventions”) is more of the case specific data (CSD) in targeted threat assessment cases that general violence risk assessment tools were not developed to identify. It is the combination of TA and RA variables that makes for a more comprehensive assessment and more useful interventions. We have seen under-reacting by some professionals who erroneously use general violence risk assessment tools as the standalone measure to determine risk of violence of a threat maker not understanding that some individuals may not pose a risk for general violence yet may be moving rapidly on a pathway of violence towards a particular justifiable target only.

Serious violence is evolutionary but it is contextual as well. The VTRA Model highlights both traditional and non-

About the Facilitator(s)

Bonnie Randall

Bonnie Randall has been a clinical social worker in her home province of Alberta for close to 30 years. Her early career was spent working alongside Kevin Cameron as a Family School Liaison Counselor with Horizon School Division in the years leading up to the Taber School Shooting. Following that, she held an 11-year tenure with Child Protection in West-Central Alberta, carrying an investigation caseload and acting as case manager for high-risk teens. Bonnie moved into a therapeutic role in 2005 for Alberta Health Services Addictions and Mental Health. Years of providing clinical counseling to clients with substance abuse disorders and historical trauma allowed Bonnie to reflect deeply on metrics like the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Scale and the Resiliency Scale—each of which measure how early adversity and early supports quite literally change the trajectory of brain development. It was that work which inspired Bonnie to pioneer her own workshop: ACEs High, But Resiliency Holds The Winning Hand, then the supplement training of ACEs Through A VTRA Lens which examines the many intersects between a high ACEs score and the traits of the Individuals of Concern we often refer to as ‘Empty Vessels’ in Violent Threat Risk Assessment. The seriousness of early adversity combined with the measure of hope within resiliency make these workshops truly unique and inspirational; healing is not only possible but also attainable when we match resource to risk then support people in making the lasting gains which, quite literally, change their lives.

Bonnie lives in the Greater Edmonton Area with her husband, an educator and school principal for close to thirty years. When she is not immersed in clinical practice or out on the road for CTIP, Bonnie is a fiction novelist whose most recent fiction title, the Critically Acclaimed novel *The Shadow Collector*, rapidly became an Amazon #1 Bestseller upon its release in May 2023.

traditional risk enhancing variables overlaid with a human systems based contextual assessment that allows Multidisciplinary VTRA teams to make an actual determination of current risk for harm to self or others and plan a comprehensive data driven intervention based on the case specific data.

Trained VTRA teams work from the perspective that “serious violence is an evolutionary process” and therefore no one “just snaps” and that pre-incident data is often available that can help identify and prevent serious violence. Yet, not everyone moves along the same evolutionary pathway. Some individuals have clear escalating patterns of violent offending so that when they “finally” kill someone those who know the perpetrator are not surprised. Others, however, can shock their entire community by seemingly going from a model citizen to killing their spouse, coworker, or classmate. In the latter example, it may be that those close to the perpetrator were simply not aware of his or her history of violence.

Some perpetrators evolve behaviorally with increasing frequency and intensity of violence over years while others evolve cognitively and emotionally wherein the frequency and intensity of their thinking and feelings (fantasies) about violence evolve over months and years until their first violent act. Whatever the pathway, most people give signs and indicators that VTRA Teams are trained to look for that allow for both early intervention and identification of rapidly evolving individuals of concern.

The Evolution of Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA)

The 10th edition of the ‘National Training VTRA Protocol’ presented in the Level One VTRA Training is the first truly “Community Protocol”. In the past, prior editions had a primary focus on school related cases and thus the word “student” was frequently used as the focus of inquiry. In this edition, we use the terms student, subject, client, patient, etc. as interchangeable terms. Because many cases over the years have also involved parents/caregivers, faculty, staff and others, who have become the subject of a VTRA, we will more frequently use the term “person of concern” to denote the broad application of the VTRA Model.

The modern application of VTRA recognizes all formal signed protocol partners as equal. This means that any signed partner can activate the VTRA Protocol and appropriate partners related to the case at hand will assist them. Some of the most compelling cases across Canada have been when police, mental health, child protection, health care providers and other agencies have activated the protocol.

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, York Region, Ontario and Lethbridge, Alberta have all led the way over the past few years with including Post-Secondary Institutions in their “Community Protocols.” Now several VTRA trained agencies

She is currently busy working on Book II in her Shadow Valley series.

are applying the process internally for staff members, former staff and clients who engage in threatmaking or threat-related behaviours.

The British Columbia Government has supported VTRA Training and protocol development formally through the ERASE Initiative. The Saskatchewan Department of Education and others have likewise assisted in ensuring that all regions of the Province are VTRA trained. In Surrey, B.C. the VTRA Model is the foundation for the highly successful Surrey WRAP youth gang prevention initiative. The recognition that many young people who are becoming radicalized are similar to the school shooters in that most have no histories of violence and are easily understood as “Empty Vessels” has led to the development of our new training in “Criminal Radicalization.”

Additionally, the current political climate in North America and beyond has contributed to an intensification of “hate-related” VTRA cases towards human differences such as race, religion and gender, as well as sexual and gender minorities. Societal anxiety is high and we state “the higher the anxiety the greater the symptom development”. Therefore, both a broader application of the VTRA Model and a higher level of multi-agency collaboration is essential at this juncture of our world’s history.

Level One VTRA Training Outline

DAY ONE - MORNING

Serious Violence is Evolutionary – No One Just
Snaps
Evolutionary Process
Justification Process
Commitment
Snap Theory
Pathway to Violence
Cry for Help
Under – Reaction

Threat Assessment vs. Risk Assessment
Threat Assessment
Risk Assessment
Worrisome Behaviour

Traumatic Events System (TES) Model
Theoretical
Foundation
Background
Crisis vs. Traumatic Event
Critical Periods

Other Potential Warning Signs
Dehumanization

Frequency/Intensity/Recency
Empty Vessels
Imitators vs. Innovators

Human Target Selection and Site Selection
Human Target Selection
Site Selection
Unidimensional Assessments

DAY ONE - AFTERNOON

Offender Typologies
Traditional High Risk Individual,
Predominately Cognitive Type
Traditional High Risk Individual, Predominately Behavioural
Type
Mixed Type High Risk Individual
Non-Traditional High Risk Individual
Priming
Baseline Behaviours

Fluidity

DAY TWO - MORNING

Human Systems Theory
Naturally Open Systems
Naturally Closed Systems
Traumatically Open Systems
Traumatically Closed Systems

Three Phase VTRA Model
Protocol Development
Protocol Maintenance
Determining When to Activate the VTRA Protocol

DAY TWO - AFTERNOON

Working With Cultural Diversity
Individuals with Special Needs/Disabilities – DSM V & ICD 10
CM Diagnoses
Responsible Sharing Of Information
Violence Threat Risk Assessment: Evaluation
Violence Threat Risk Assessment: Managing Beyond The
Initial Threat
Anonymous Threats: Assessment And Intervention

This session is being offered on a cost recovery basis.