

Together We Are Stronger

The horrific tragedy in Uvalde, Texas is incomprehensible. Watching the events unfold creates panic and terror that something like that could happen in our town or in our school. As a parent of four children, I cannot stop my mind from going to the families of students at Robb Elementary, their fear and how they will carry on afterward. Like you, I am holding my children a little closer, a little tighter, a little longer, breathing in their sweetness, wishing I could keep them in a safe bubble. Not only that, I want to hold school staff close too. My heart aches for how they are feeling walking into their schools, what are they thinking about as they look upon the precious faces of their students. How do their families feel about watching them leave for work in the morning?

Are Students and Staff Safe in Our School Division?

[Northern Gateway School Division](#) has a process in place to ensure that every incident of child and/or youth violence in our communities is addressed. Four years ago, [North American Center for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response](#) (NACTATR) trained NGPS staff and community partners in Levels 1 and 2 VTRA - Violent Threat Risk Assessment. We learned how to prevent, respond and intervene to threats of violence, and/or trauma in schools and communities.

VTRA is effective because it involves schools and community agencies working together. RCMP, Children's Services, Mental Health and Addiction, Alberta Justice, Family Support Programs, Youth workers, Victim Service Units, and psychologists in each NGPS community are VTRA trained.

These trained, multi-disciplinary teams of professionals are able to identify the early signs of risk in persons of concern and work together through high end threat assessment starting with thorough data collection to comprehensive interventions.

What does VTRA teach?

VTRA teaches that serious violence is an evolutionary process, no one ever just snaps. People are influenced by a large number of factors, and their motivation to act out violently fluctuates, along with their emotional state. There are always signs that indicate a person is moving along a pathway to violence and VTRA teaches how to recognize and respond to those signs.

There is Still More Work To Do

Like all good things, the learning never stops. We need to ensure that professionals are continually staying up to date with VTRA training and research. We know that healthy relationships are key. Students need to have their tanks full and know they are cared for. People who are struggling with their mental health need to know where and how to get help. We all need to continue to work together for the health and safety of our children, schools and communities.

Need Help Now?

Crisis Hotline 1-877-303-2642
Health Link 811

Kid's Helpline 1-800-668-6868
Distress Hotline 1-800-232-7288

Emergencies 911

This article was written by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Student Support Facilitator. She is a support for schools, students, parents and caregivers to promote success in school. Tammy advocates for students and families. Tammy has been a Registered Social Worker for more than 20 years and is a mother to 3 teenagers and 1 young adult.