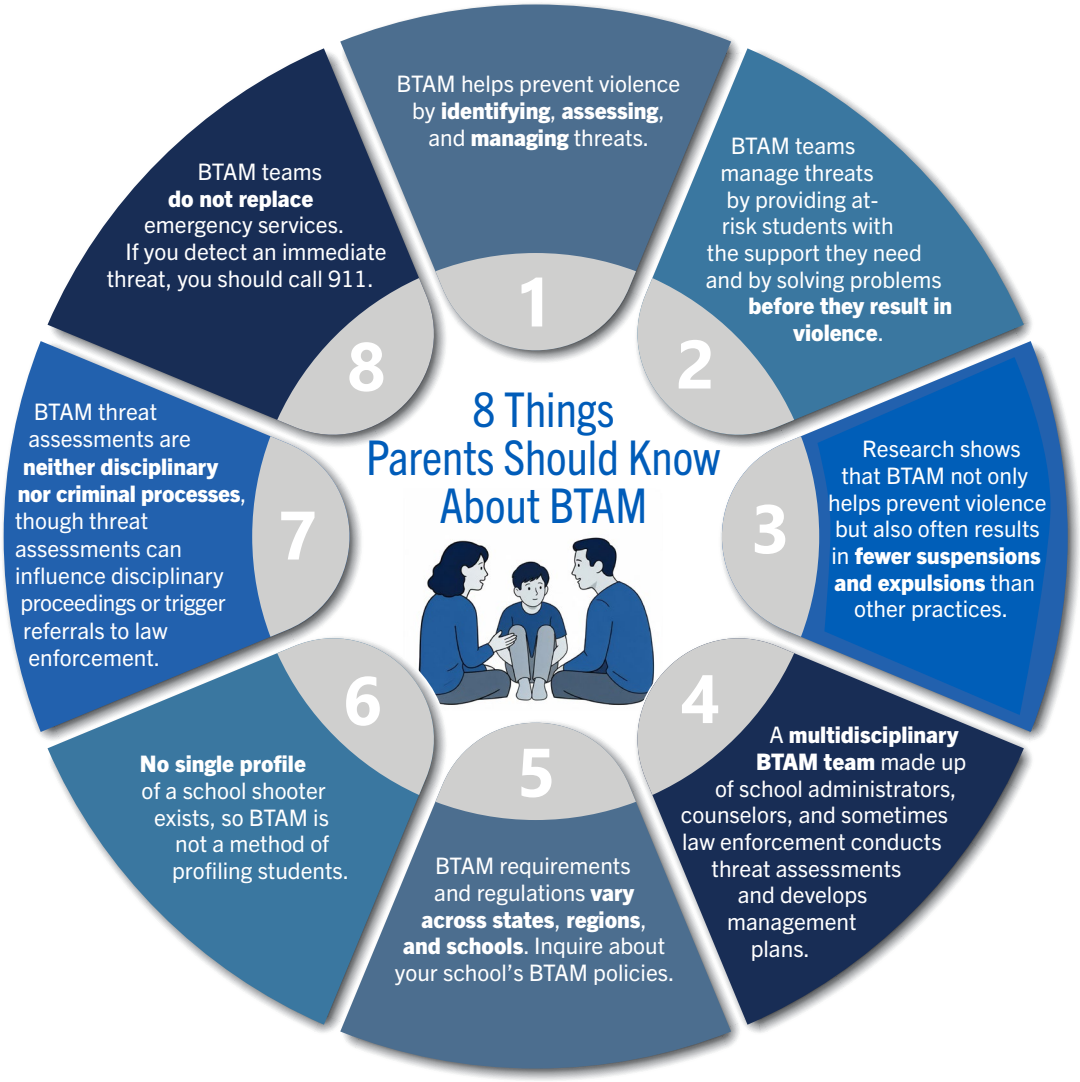
BTAM: Information for Parents

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If you have a child attending public school, chances are their school has a behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) team. A recent survey of principals found that 97 percent of public schools participated in some form of BTAM activity in the 2024 to 2025 school year.[1] BTAM practices vary by location, but this explainer provides general information that all parents should know about BTAM.



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What Is BTAM?

BTAM is a method of preventing violence by recognizing warning signs and handling the situation in a way that serves the interests of all involved, including the at-risk student. The following are key features of BTAM.

BTAM relies on bystanders. The BTAM process begins when parents, other students, or teachers report warning signs—such as a student threatening to harm others. A trained BTAM team at the school then investigates whether a threat is present. In most cases, the team works with the student to understand the severity and underlying causes of the threat. If the team determines that the student is at risk of committing violence, the team develops a tailored threat management plan for the student to resolve the problem before violence occurs. The management plan will incorporate existing resources, such as counseling and mental health services, to provide the student with a support system.

BTAM is done by a team. School-based BTAM teams, which sometimes have other names, are often led by a school administrator. These teams usually include representatives from multiple disciplines. Public school BTAM teams most often include the following members:[2]

- Principal
- Counselors
- Other school administrators
- School-based law enforcement
- Social worker
- Psychologist

By incorporating multidisciplinary members, BTAM teams are better able to share information and help the student access resources and support from across school life. The team is also able to provide multiple perspectives regarding the student's behavior and make informed decisions.

BTAM is intended to help *all* students. BTAM seeks to protect students from violence while comprehensively identifying and addressing the needs of students referred for threat assessments. The process is designed to prevent a student from taking any further steps toward violence. To mitigate identified threats, the team may create a management plan designed to meet the at-risk student's needs. Management plans vary by student but may include school counseling or mental health services, mentoring, IEP/504 plan development or revision, or referrals to other services.[3]

BTAM is implemented differently across schools. BTAM processes must follow all state, district, and local regulations. Some schools require BTAM teams to have specific members and to conduct threat assessments in a specified way. Other schools have no such requirements.

For example, involving parents or guardians in threat assessments is considered a best practice,[4] but many states leave the decision to involve parents or guardians to local policy-makers. Thus, when and how schools inform parents or guardians about threat assessments varies. In some states, a parent or guardian must be notified at various stages of a threat assessment for a child. They might be notified before the BTAM team conducts a threat assessment,[5] if the team determines the student poses a threat,[6] or within 48 hours of a report being made to external law enforcement.[7] To get accurate information about notification processes, consult the BTAM policies of your child's school.

What Is BTAM *Not?*

BTAM teams can be quite different, but their core function—identifying, assessing, and managing threats to prevent violence—remains the same. The following are some common BTAM misconceptions.

BTAM is not a disciplinary or criminal proceeding. BTAM is separate from school discipline and is not directly tied to the legal system. To be clear, threat management *could* require law enforcement involvement to address an immediate threat, and information discovered as part of a threat assessment *could* lead to disciplinary actions or a criminal investigation.[8] However, a student involved in the BTAM process will not automatically face legal consequences.

Even so, law enforcement officers—especially school-based law enforcement officers—are encouraged to participate in BTAM because they provide investigative skills and experience with threat assessment.[9] Many school-based officers also have existing relationships with the students and can provide their informed perspectives. Law enforcement presence on a BTAM team does not necessarily increase the likelihood of legal action. In fact, some research has shown that law enforcement action following threat assessments in schools occurs less than 2 percent of the time.[10] In 2025, a review of almost 1,200 interventions (in both school and non-school settings) found that BTAM teams handled 93 percent of cases without needing external law enforcement.[11] Nonetheless, officers on a BTAM team may need to step into a law enforcement role if there is an immediate threat, such as a weapon on campus.[12]

BTAM is not profiling. Multiple federal agencies and research institutions have clearly demonstrated that there is no profile of a school shooter.[13] As such, there is no way to profile a student based on demographics. As a result, BTAM teams look for behavioral warning signs, not personal characteristics.[14] A threat assessment would be initiated based on only a student's behavior, such as stated threats or an expressed obsession with past school shooters.

BTAM is not a replacement for emergency services. Though BTAM teams may include law enforcement officers, they are not a first response unit. The BTAM team strives to get involved and resolve a situation *before* an emergency occurs. However, in the event of a weapon on campus, active violence, or an immediate threat, you should call 911 immediately.

What Else Should Parents Know?

Research has shown that BTAM teams have been successful in preventing targeted violence. The BTAM process also frequently results in better outcomes for at-risk students than other approaches.[15] For example, when schools use a structured BTAM process, suspensions and expulsions become less necessary.[16] Students in schools that use BTAM are also more likely to receive counseling services and parent conferences compared to students at other schools.[17]

Can I find more information online? BTAM teams must adhere to the laws, mandates, and policies they are subject to. As such, guidelines that govern one district may not apply in another. When searching for BTAM information online, make sure the information applies to your school or district.



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