

Threat Assessment Guidelines Toolkit

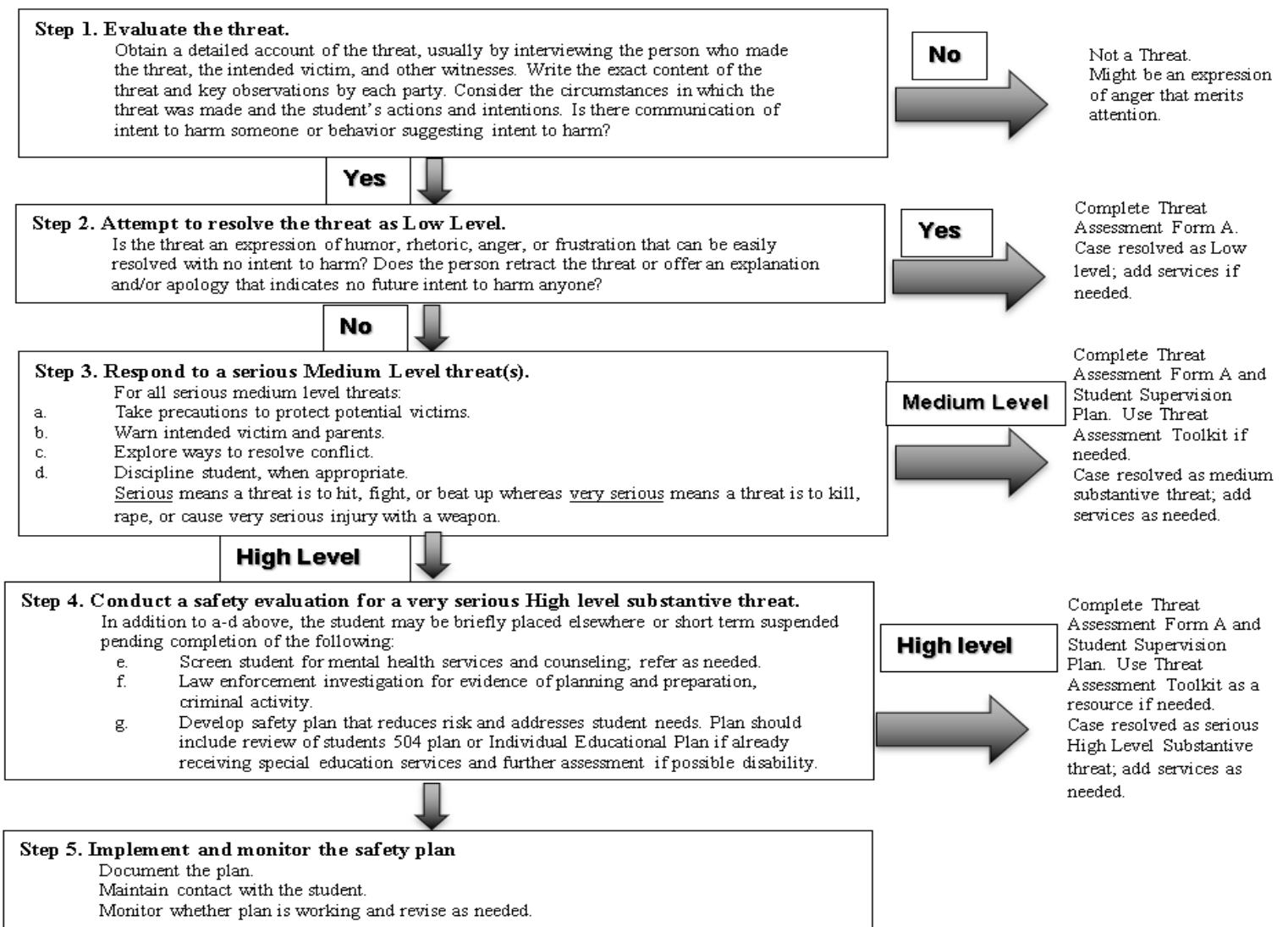
Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

OVERVIEW

A threat is a communication of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, written, gestured, or expressed in some other form, such as via text messaging, email, or other digital means. An expression of intent to harm someone is considered a threat regardless of whether it is communicated to the intended target(s) and regardless of whether the intended target is aware of the threat. Threats may be implied by behavior that an observer would reasonably regard as threatening, planning, or preparing to commit a violent act. When in doubt, treat the communication or behavior as a threat and conduct a threat assessment. Threats that are not easily recognized as harmless (e.g., an obvious joke that worries no one) should be reported to the school administrator or other team members. The administrator or another team member makes a preliminary determination of protocol. **A transient threat means there is no sustained intent to harm and a substantive threat means the intent is present (or not clear) and therefore requires protective action. This form is a guide for conducting a threat assessment, but each case may have unique features that require some modification.**

A threat assessment is not a crisis response. If there is indication that violence is imminent (e.g., a person has a firearm at school or is on the way to school to attack someone), a crisis response is appropriate. Take immediate action such as calling 911 and follow the school crisis response plan.

School Threat Assessment Decision Tree



*This 5-step decision tree is a revision of the original 7-step decision tree for the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines that retains the same information and procedures in a more condensed format.

Adopted 1/2023

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS (All sources are not needed in most cases)

Sources of Information	Was information reviewed	Relevant Findings
Prior Threats	Not Available	
Prior Discipline Incidents	Not Available	
Academic Records	Not Available	
Special Education Records	Not Available	
Other Records	Not Available	
Records from Other Schools	Not Available	
Records from Outside Agencies (e.g. social services or mental health)	Not Available	
Law Enforcement Records (e.g. criminal history, contacts, firearms purchases, etc)	Not Available	

Target or Witness Interview Questions

Use these questions as a guide to interview the person targeted by the threat. Ask other questions as appropriate. Try to use open-ended questions rather than leading questions.

1. Do you know why I want to talk to you? What happened today when you were [place of incident]? (Record the person's exact words with quotation marks for key statements if possible.)
2. What exactly did (subject) say? And what exactly did (subject) do?
3. What did you think he or she meant when he or she said or did that? (Does the target believe that the subject intends to carry out the threat?)
4. How do you feel about what (subject) said or did?
5. What was the reason (subject) said or did that? (Probe to find out if there is a prior conflict or history to this threat.)
6. What are you going to do now? (Ask questions to determine how the target plans to respond to the threat and assist in planning a safe and non-provocative response.) What do you think he/she will do now?

Interview Questions

When a threat is identified, obtain a specific account of the threat by interviewing the student who made the threat. Write the exact content of the threat and statements by each party. Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the threatening individual's intentions/acts/behaviors.

1. Do you know why I want to talk to you? What happened today when you were [place of incident]? (Record person's exact words with quotation marks for key statements if possible.)
2. What exactly did you say? And what exactly did you do?
3. What did you mean when you said or did that?
4. How do you think [person who was threatened] feels about what you said or did? (Probe to see if the subject believes it frightened or intimidated the person.)
5. What was the reason you said or did that? (Probe to find out if there is a prior conflict or history to this threat.)
6. What are you going to do now? (Ask questions to determine if the subject intends to carry out the threat.)

KEY OBSERVATIONS

These items can help assess whether a threat is transient or substantive, but must be considered in the broader context of the situation and other known facts. Regard these items as a checklist to make sure you have considered these aspects of the threat, but they are not to be summed or used as a score.

Threat is likely to be less serious:

1. Subject admits to threat (statement or behavior).	Don't know/Not Available	
2. Subject has explanation for threat as benign (such as joke or figure of speech).	Don't know/Not Available	
3. Subject admits feeling angry toward target at time of threat.	Don't know/Not Available	
4. Subject retracts threat or denies intent to harm.	Don't know/Not Available	
5. Subject apologetic or willing to make amends for threat.	Don't know/Not Available	
6. Subject willing to resolve threat through conflict resolution or some other means.	Don't know/Not Available	

Threat is more likely to be serious:

7. Subject continues to feel angry toward the target.	Don't know/Not Available	
8. Subject expressed threat on more than one occasion.	Don't know/Not Available	
9. Subject has a specific plan for carrying out the threat.	Don't know/Not Available	
10. Subject engaged in preparation for carrying out the threat.	Don't know/Not Available	
11. Subject has prior conflict with the target or other motive.	Don't know/Not Available	
12. Subject is suicidal. (Supplement with suicide assessment.)	Don't know/Not Available	
13. Threat involved use of a weapon other than a firearm, such as a knife or club.	Don't know/Not Available	
14. Threat involves use of a firearm.	Don't know/Not Available	

15. Subject has possession of, or ready access to, a firearm.	Don't know/Not Available	
16. Subject has or sought accomplices or audience for carrying out threat.	Don't know/Not Available	
17. Threat involves gang conflict.	Don't know/Not Available	
18. Threat involves peers or others who have encouraged subject in making threat.	Don't know/Not Available	
Other relevant observations:		

OBSERVATIONS SUGGESTING NEED FOR INTERVENTION		
This is an optional form used for intervention planning. Here are some factors to consider in identifying possible interventions to assist the subject and reduce risk. These items are not summed or scored. Use the term "partially" as appropriate to the category to mean the condition is moderate or not clearly present.		
1. History of physical violence.	Don't know/Not Available	
2. History of criminal acts.	Don't know/Not Available	
3. Preoccupation with violence, violent individuals, or groups that advocate violence.	Don't know/Not Available	
4. Preoccupation with mass shootings or infamous violent incidents.	Don't know/Not Available	
5. Has been found with violent drawings or writings created by self or others.	Don't know/Not Available	
6. History of intense anger, loses temper easily, or resentment.	Don't know/Not Available	
7. Has engaged in severe property destruction or aggression toward animals.	Don't know/Not Available	
8. Display a high number of attention-seeking behaviors.	Don't know/Not Available	
9. Overreacts to minor frustrations or has impulse control difficulties.	Don't know/Not Available	
10. Has grievance or feels treated unfairly.	Don't know/Not Available	
11. Feels abused, harassed, or bullied.	Don't know/Not Available	
12. History of self-injury or suicide ideation or attempts.	Don't know/Not Available	
13. Has been seriously depressed, hopeless, or lethargic.	Don't know/Not Available	
14. Experienced serious stressful events or conditions.	Don't know/Not Available	
15. Substance abuse history with drugs or alcohol.	Don't know/Not Available	
16. History of serious mental illness (symptoms such as delusions or hallucinations).	Don't know/Not Available	
17. Might or does qualify for special education or Section 504 due to serious emotional/behavioral disturbance.	Don't know/Not Available	
18. Prescribed psychotropic medication.	Don't know/Not Available	
19. Substantial decline in level of academic or psychosocial adjustment.	Don't know/Not Available	

20. Lacks positive relationships with one or more school staff.	Don't know/Not Available	
21. Lacks supportive family, history of caregiver rejection or lack of parental involvement.	Don't know/Not Available	
22. Lacks positive relationships with peers or poor social skills.	Don't know/Not Available	
23. Generally an outcast or alienated group of peers.	Don't know/Not Available	
24. Has exhibited a lack of concern for the safety of others.	Don't know/Not Available	
25. Have ineffective problem-solving skills.	Don't know/Not Available	
26. Has experienced significant stressors at home, school, or elsewhere in the past 12 months.	Don't know/Not Available	
27. Has recent or sudden change in behavior or physical appearance.	Don't know/Not Available	
28. Other factors that suggest need for intervention.	Don't know/Not Available	

THREAT RESPONSE

This is a list of options that may be taken in response to a threat. Each case is different and may require a unique set of actions. Add date and signature of person taking action if appropriate. Not if action was recommended but for some reason not completed (e.g., parent refusal.)

•	1. Increased contact/monitoring of subject	•	13. Assess need for special education services
•	2. Reprimand or warning	•	14. Review of IEP for students already receiving services
•	3. Parent Conference	•	15. 504 Plan or modifications to 504 plan.
•	4. Student apology	•	16. Behavior Intervention Plan created or modified
•	5. Contacted target of threat, including parent if target is a minor	•	17. In school suspension
•	6. Counseling	•	18. Out of school suspension
•	7. Conflict mediation	•	19. Referral for expulsion
•	8. Schedule change	•	20. Other disciplinary action
•	9. Transportation change	•	21. Change in school placement
•	10. Mental health assessment	•	22. Services for other persons affected by threat
•	11. Mental health services in school	•	23. Law enforcement consulted
•	12. Mental health services outside school	•	24. Other actions:

MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT Guidelines

Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines

****Parent/Guardian should be notified and give permission for school staff to complete a mental health assessment per legislative guidance KSA72-6316. Parent/Guardian should also be provided all information obtained from the screening tool.***

A mental health assessment is usually conducted in cases involving a very serious high level substantive threat. The purpose of the mental health assessment is to maintain the safety and well-being of the student and others. Therefore, the assessment has two objectives:

1. *Treatment and referral needs.* Assess the student's present mental state and determine whether there are urgent mental health needs that

require attention, such as risk of suicide, psychosis, or rage. Beyond these immediate needs, consider whether there are other treatment, referral, or support needs.

2. *Threat reduction.* Gather information on the student's motives and intentions in making the threat to understand why the threat was made and identify relevant strategies or interventions that have the potential to reduce the risk of violence.

Subject Interview

Subject Name:

Person Conducting Interview:

Usually the interview can begin by asking "Do you know why I want to talk to you?" and after the subject has responded, "Let me explain the purpose of our meeting today." Use these questions as a guide to interview the person making the threat. Ask other questions as appropriate. Try to use open-ended questions rather than leading questions. Adjust spacing below as needed.

Review of threat

1. What happened that made others worried that you wanted to harm someone? What exactly did you say or do that made them worried? What did you mean by that?
2. I know you must have had reasons to say (or do) that; can you explain what led up to it?
3. How would you do it? (Carry out the threat) (Probe for details of any planning or preparation.) Where did the idea come from?
4. What could happen that would make you want to do it? (carry out the threat)
5. What would happen if you did do it? (review both effects on intended victims and consequences for student)
6. What were you feeling then? How do you feel now?
7. How do you think (the person threatened) felt?

Relationship with intended victim (s)

1. How long have you known this person?
2. What has happened in the past between you and this person?
3. What do you think this person deserves?
4. Do you see any way that things could be improved between you and this person?

Family support

1. Whom do you live with? Are there family members you don't live with? Have there been any changes in the past year?
2. Whom in your home are you close to?
3. How well do your parents/guardians know you?
4. Where do you go after school? Where are your parents/guardians at this time? How much do they keep track of where you are and what you are doing?
5. How strict are your parents/guardians? What do they do if you do something they don't want you to do? When was the last time you got in trouble with them? What was the worst time?
6. How will your parents/guardians react (or how did they react) when they found out about this situation?

Stress and trauma

1. What kinds of things have been going on with you lately? What sorts of things are you worried about?
2. How has your school work been going lately? Are there things you have been worried about with your school work? Other things at school?
3. What is the worst thing that has happened to you lately? Have any other bad things happened? Is there something you regret or wish you could change?
4. Have there been any changes in your family? Has anyone been sick, moved away, or had anything bad happen to them?
5. Do you have any family members in jail or prison?
6. Do you take any medications?
7. Have you been involved in any counseling?

Mood

1. What has your mood been like the past few weeks? Have you felt down or depressed at times? How bad has it been? (be alert for statements of pessimism and hopelessness that might indicate suicide risk. If there are indications of suicidal thoughts or feelings, consider a more extensive evaluation of suicide risk. If necessary, develop a plan for protecting the student and making appropriate referrals.)
2. Have you felt nervous or anxious? Irritable or short-tempered? How bad has it been?
3. Have you ever felt like life wasn't worth living/ like maybe you would kill yourself?
4. Have you ever done something to hurt yourself on purpose? Ever cut yourself on purpose?
5. Have you had any problems with sleep? Appetite? Energy Level? Concentration?

Psychotic Symptoms

Ask a few probing questions and follow up if there is any indication of delusions or hallucinations. Phrase questions appropriate to the student's age and understanding.

1. Have you had any unusual experiences lately, such as hearing things that others cannot hear or seeing things that others cannot see?
2. Have you felt like someone was out to get you or wanted to harm you? Have you had any other fears that seem strange or out of the ordinary?
3. Have you felt numb or disconnected from the world, or like you were somehow outside your body?

Weapons

Ask about any weapons mentioned in the threat. As an example, these questions concern a threat made to stab someone.

1. You said that you were going to stab (name of victim). What were you going to stab him with?
2. Do you have a knife? What kind of a knife is it? (Or how would you get a knife?)
3. Have you ever had to use a knife with someone? What happened?

4. What do you think would happen if you did use a knife with (name of victim)?

Access to firearms

Ask about firearms in all cases, even if no firearm was mentioned. If the threat involved a knife, bomb, or other weapon, ask about that weapon too.

1. Do you have a gun?
2. Are there guns in your home? Have you ever used a gun for hunting or target shooting?
3. If you wanted a gun, how would you get one?
4. What do you think you might do if you had a gun?
5. Have you ever had to use a gun with someone? Have you ever thought about using a gun with someone?

Aggressive behavior

1. Do people treat you fairly? Who has been unfair with you lately? When people treat you unfairly, what do you do about it?
2. When you get angry, what do you do? Has your temper ever gotten you into trouble?
3. Do you get into fights? When was the last time? What happened?
4. Have you ever threatened to harm anyone before?
5. Have you thought about what it would be like to hurt someone really bad? Have you written any stories or made any drawings that are violent?
6. Have you ever set fire to things?
7. Have you ever damaged your own property or someone else’s property?
8. Have you ever intentionally hurt an animal?

Bullying

Bullying is broadly defined and may include teasing, social exclusion, or other forms of humiliation in addition to physical threats of violence. The student may not use the term “bully,” and may be reluctant to admit being the victim of bullying behavior, so be prepared to rephrase questions and probe for victim experiences.

1. Is there anyone who has threatened you recently? Is there anyone who makes you feel afraid? (Ask about sexual threats if appropriate to situation.)
2. Is there anyone who has teased you or picked on you recently? Is there anyone who has beat you up or pushed you around? How about at home?

Peer relations

1. What are your friends like? Have you had any trouble with your friends lately? Who is your best friend?
2. Do you have friends who get in trouble?
3. Do any of your friends know about (refer to threat situation?) What did they say about it? Anyone who feels the same anyway you do?

Parent Interview

Parent Name:	Relationship to Student:
Person Conducting Interview:	Date of Interview:

Understandably, parents may feel apprehensive, guilty, or defensive when being interviewed about their child’s behavior. It is important that the interviewer find ways to convey respect for the parent, starting from the initial contact and throughout the interview. Also, it should be evident that the interviewer is interested in understanding and helping the parent’s child; otherwise, the parent may regard the interview as an investigation designed to uncover evidence of wrongdoing by the student or incompetence by the parent. Overall, the interviewer should make every effort to engage the parent as an ally. Emphasize the common goal of helping their child to be safe and successful in school.

Parent knowledge of the threat

1. What do you know about the threat?
2. Have you heard your child (or use child’s name) talk about things like this before?
3. Are you familiar with (the intended victim)? (Ask about the child’s history with the intended victim- previous relationship and interactions.)
4. (Ask questions to determine if the child has the means to carry out the threat, such as access to firearms.)

School Adjustment

1. Has your child ever been suspended or expelled from school?
2. Have you ever met with the school (teachers, counselor, principal) about concerns in the past? What happened, what was going on, what was the outcome?
3. Has your child ever been tested in school for special education or Section 504 services?
4. How does your child like school?

Family relationships and current stressors

1. Who lives in the home?
2. Are there any important events that have affected your family/child? Ask about recent or pending changes, such as:
Move, divorce/separation, losses
Financial status, employment changes for parents
Others in home involved with court or the law
3. Who does your child share concerns with? Who is he/she close to?
4. How well does he/she get along with parents? Siblings? Type of conflicts, over what, how resolved?
5. How does your child show anger toward you and other family members?
6. Does your child follow rules? What are the consequences for not following the rules?

Peer relations and bullying

1. Has your child reported being teased, intimidated, rejected or bullied in some other way? (If so, what has the parent done in response?)
2. Who are your child's friends? Are you pleased or displaced with your child's choice of friends?
3. How much is the child influenced by peers? Are there any examples of your child doing something to please peers that got him or her into trouble?

Delinquent behavior

1. Has your child been in trouble with the law or with the police before? What happened?
2. Has your child ever gone to juvenile court? What was it about?
3. Has your child done things that could have gotten him or her arrested and in trouble with the law? What was the worst thing? What else?
4. Does your child drink beer, wine, or other alcohol?
5. Does your child smoke marijuana or use other drugs?

History of aggression

1. When your child gets angry, what does he/she do?
2. Has your child gotten into fights in the past? When, where, with whom?
3. Has your child's temper gotten him/her into trouble?
4. Has your child ever hit you or other family members?
5. Has your child destroyed his or her own things, or someone else's property?
6. Does your child have any pets? Has he/she ever intentionally hurt the pet or some other animal?

Access to weapons

1. Do you have a gun in your home? Does your child have access to firearms through friends, relatives, or some other source?
2. Does your child have access to weapons other than firearms, such as military knives, martial arts weapons, or some other kind of weapons?
3. Has your child ever talked about using a weapon to hurt someone? Ever gotten into trouble for using a weapon, or threatening someone with a weapon?
4. What can you do to restrict your child's access to weapons?

Exposure to violence

1. Has your child ever been a victim of abuse?
2. Is your child exposed to violence in the neighborhood?

Mental Health

1. What has your child's mood been like the past few weeks?
2. Has your child had problems with sleep? Appetite? Energy level? Concentration?
3. Has your child ever talked about hurting himself or herself? Have you ever been concerned that he/she might be suicidal?
4. Has your child ever seen a counselor or therapist? Ever taken medication for his/her behavior or mood?
5. Has your child had any involvement with other agencies/programs in the community?

Teacher/Staff Interview

Name of Person Interviewed:

Person Conducting Interview:

Academics

1. How is this student doing academically? Has there been any changes in recent weeks?
2. What are this student's verbal skills? How well can he or she express himself/herself in words?

Teacher knowledge of threat

1. What do you know about the threat?
2. Have you heard this student talk about things like this before?
3. What have other students told you about this incident?
4. Is there another teacher or staff member who might know something about this?

Student's peer relations

1. How well does the student get along with other students?
2. Who are the student's friends?
3. Are there students who do not get along with this student?
4. Have there been other conflicts or difficulties with peers?
5. Has this student ever complained of being bullied, teased, or treated unfairly by others?

Depression

1. Have there been any apparent changes in the student's mood, demeanor, or activity level? Seemed withdrawn or apathetic?
2. Has the student expressed any attitudes that could imply depression, such as expressions of hopelessness or futility, inadequacy or shame, self-criticism or worthlessness?
3. Has this student shown an increase in irritability or seemed short-tempered?

Discipline

1. What kinds of discipline problems have you experienced with this student?
2. How does this student respond to being corrected by an adult?
3. What are the student's emotional responses to being disciplined?

Aggression

1. How does this student express anger?
2. Does this student seem to hold a grudge? Seem resentful?
3. Has this student done anything that expresses anger or aggression, or has an aggressive theme in written assignments, drawings, class projects, etc.?

Guidelines