When Online Spaces Glorify Violence
A Guide for Law Enforcement

Understanding Targeted and Mass Violence Involving Youth

What's going on? Since 2024, the ADL Center on Extremism has identified more than 50 attacks, plots, and other criminal activities worldwide linked to the True Crime Community. These cases underscore the risk posed by online communities that glorify mass violence, circulate content from prior attacks, and reward acts of cruelty and violence with social standing.

These spaces are not always defined by a single ideology. Participants may adopt antisemitic, white supremacist, or other extremist rhetoric either out of conviction, to align themselves with prior attackers, or to appear more extreme or dangerous to peers. This dynamic can normalize violence and contribute to pathways toward targeted violence.

Understanding the Digital Threat Landscape

True Crime Community (TCC): An online subculture in which some participants admire, glorify, or imitate mass killers. The most extreme segments can provide an audience for individuals seeking recognition through violence. It differs from mainstream interest in true crime, which often focuses on victims or justice.

The Com and 764: Loosely connected online networks that exploit young people through sextortion, harassment, coerced self-harm, and other forms of abuse.

Gore sites: Websites and forums that share real footage of violence and death, often alongside extremist content.

Memetic violence: ADL's term for targeted violence carried out primarily to gain attention, notoriety, or status within online communities. In these cases, violence may be treated as "content" to be documented, shared, and imitated.

What Sets This Threat Apart

- **Notoriety can be a primary motive.** Some individuals seek attention or fame; they may carefully document their plans, livestream their attacks, or write manifestos in hopes of maximizing attention.
- **Violence can become referential.** Individuals may invoke earlier perpetrators, adopting their language or tactics.
- **Ideology may be fluid.** Hateful symbols and language may be sincere or performative. Target selection and writings can help tell the difference.
- **It reaches mainstream platforms.** Content that glorifies violence can circulate on mainstream social media and gaming platforms, reaching young people where they already spend time.

Keep it in Perspective

Many young people who encounter violent or hateful content online will never hurt anyone. Viewing or sharing it is not, on its own, a sign of intent. Focus on behavior and context, alongside grievances, capability, and planning.

Potential Indicators Requiring Assessment

No single behavior proves that someone intends to commit violence. The indicators below may warrant closer assessment when they are persistent, escalating, or occurring together.

- Direct threats, hints or "jokes" about harming oneself or others, including expectations of one's own death
- Researching prior attacks and attackers, weapons, and targets
- Acquiring weapons or equipment
- Observing or testing security at a potential target
- Writing a manifesto or preparing other materials intended for a future audience
- Escalating harassment, swatting, or threats toward people or institutions.

Investigative Considerations

Preserve digital content. Document relevant posts, usernames, timestamps, direct messages, and associated accounts.

Coordinate early. Engage appropriate threat assessment, mental health, school, child protection, and community partners to manage risk and connect youth and families with support services.

Avoid amplifying harmful content. Limit sharing of graphic material and unnecessary use of perpetrators' names, as doing so can reward attention-seeking behavior.

Where BTAM fits

Behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) complements criminal investigations by helping assess risk and intervening before a situation escalates.

Work across disciplines. Coordinate with schools, mental health professionals, and community organizations to share relevant information, assess concerns, and identify appropriate interventions.

Build trust in reporting. Community members are more likely to share concerns when they understand what to report, who to turn to, and how the information will be handled.

Build capacity. Offer threat assessment and deescalation training to all personnel. ADL also offers briefings on online communities that may reinforce threat-related behavior and pathways toward violence.

Resources for law enforcement and public safety partners

National Threat Assessment Center
https://www.secretservice.gov/protection/ntac

Association of Threat Assessment Professionals
atapworldwide.org

Briefings and training
ADL and Law Enforcement

Scan to learn more
Research, warning signs & resources

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