



MD | BIT  
AFFINITY



# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment

## Participant Guide



# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment



## Types of Violence



### AFFECTIVE VIOLENCE

- Emotional reaction
- Based on situations and environmental stress
- Driven by adrenaline
- Lacks forethought or planning
- Can Be seen in FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE

### TARGETED VIOLENCE

- Non-emotional reaction
- Deliberate planning (weeks-months-years)
- Based in perceived/actual grievance
- Willing to sacrifice life for cause

## Types of Threat

### Howlers

Do not engage in approach behaviors and lack the intent to carry out their threats. When howlers threaten, their threats are TRANSIENT.



### Hunters

Engage in serious targeted violence, and their intent is to complete the attack. They do not draw attention to themselves by making threats, so when hunters threaten, the threats are considered SUBSTANTIVE.



### TRANSIENT THREATS

These types of threats do not express lasting intent to harm.



### SUBSTANTIVE THREATS

These threats represent a continued attempt to harm someone.

TYPE OF THREAT	EXAMPLE
Direct	"I'm going to blow up the library."
Indirect/Vague	"Something bad is going to happen to the library."
Direct w/action/time imperative	"I'm going to blow up the library Tuesday at 3."
Conditional ultimatum	"If you don't give me a good grade, I'm going to blow up the library."
Transient	Frustrated about an assignment, a student throws a book and yells, "Burn this down!"
Substantive	"I'm going to bring a nalgene bottle of gasoline to spread on these books and light it up."
Howling	"You can't treat me like this. I'm going to set fire to the world and roast marshmallows!"
Hunting	"I have what I need. I know what I'm going to do. #fire #library"
Vague but direct	"Something bad is happening in the library soon."
Direct but vague	"They might want to invest in fire extinguishers around here."

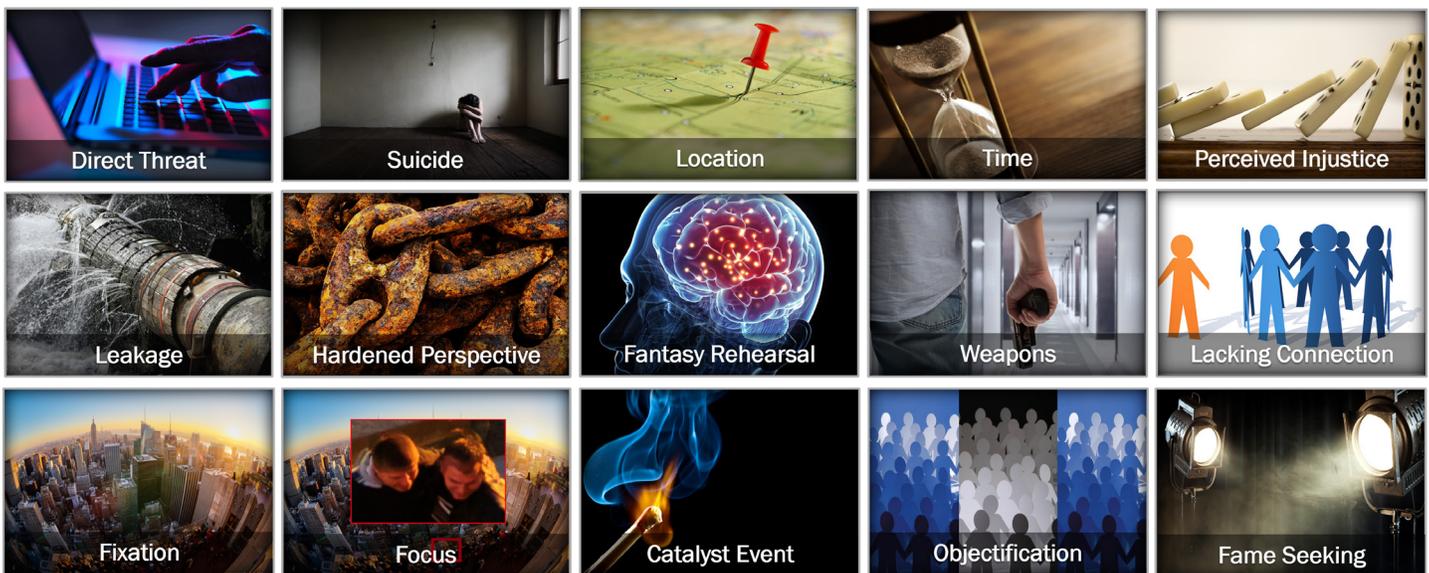
# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment

## Risk Factors

Risk factors identify the personality traits, behavioral indicators, social and peer interactions, environmental stressors, threats, acquisition of or access to lethal means, and other contextual clues that have been noted in those who move forward with a targeted attack plan.

A key aspect of understanding risk factors is the importance of seeing these in combination, like puzzle pieces coming together to create a larger meaning. As with a puzzle, one piece alone is not particularly useful. It's when these pieces combine that the factors begin to be more useful in understanding risk.

When conducting a violence risk assessment (VRA), one should avoid emphasizing any single risk factor, such as weapons access or mental illness, without regard to the context of other risk factors.



Direct threat	Indirect threat	Lacks mental support	End of a relationship
Access to weapons	Lacks peer support	Explosive reactions	Inability to date
Hardened thoughts	Lacks family support	Intimidates others	Hopelessness
Social isolation	Loss of job	Lacks empathy	Last act behavior
Victim of bullying	Decline in academics	Polarized thoughts	Legacy token
Substance abuse	Acquiring weapons	Glorifies violence	Feels persecuted
Authority conflict	Suicide attempt	Lacks remorse	Leaks attack plan
Fixation on target	Focus on target	Action plan for attack	Time frame for attack
Fantasy rehearsal	Rejection	Financial loss	Catalyst event
Feels trapped	Poor anger outlets	Fame seeking	Objectification/ Depersonalization

# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment

## Risk Factors for Targeted, Predatory, Mission-Oriented Violence

1. **Actionability** is the term used to describe if an individual has access to means and materials to carry out an attack. While firearms present a high level of concern, the VRA should determine if a potential attacker has access to any weapons, not just firearms.
2. A **hardened point of view** is a locked and fixed way of seeing the world that is resistant to other counterpoints. The individual holds a strong investment tied to these beliefs and they are often unwilling or unable to shift from these ideas.
3. **Drivenness and a justification for violent action** describe an attacker who is dedicated to committing violence in the name of a particular cause. As they escalate on the pathway to violence, they morally disengage from any external ethical or moral standards, objectify their target, and focus on mission completion.
4. **Grievance or injustice collection** takes on a dangerous characteristic where the grievance or injustice becomes a justification for violence. These grievances are most often held against those in positions of power. The attacker holds them responsible for real or imagined unfairness and difficulties.
5. Most attackers are **suicidal**. They express indifference toward life, hopelessness, and a lack of confidence about the future. They feel disempowered, misunderstood, and lost.
6. **Mental illness** can be an aggravating factor when conducted at VRA, particularly when related to thought disorders, depression, and bi-polar disorder. Most of those who carry out attacks experience psychological, behavioral, or developmental symptoms.
7. The **use of substances**, particularly stimulants, impacts decision making, increases isolation, fosters disengagement, and reduces impulse control. Drug or substance use, particularly methamphetamines or amphetamines, cocaine, or alcohol, has been connected to both affective and targeted violence.
8. Many who engage in targeted violence experience an inability to understand different perspectives. This **lack of empathy and remorse for actions** is an aggravating factor in a violence risk threat assessment.
9. When potential attackers experience frustrations, pain or feel overwhelmed, they engage in **fantasy rehearsals** to reduce their anxiety. These fantasies involve them confronting, punishing and/or destroying the target of their perceived injustices.
10. Feelings of **isolation and hopelessness** are common among those who plan targeted violence. They may experience a lack of social or advancement opportunities at home, school, or work. Most experience chronic isolation and/or an inability to create or maintain sexual or intimate relationships with others.
11. Many attackers have felt **marginalized** and expressed despair and hopelessness about a better tomorrow. This results in a perceived threat to those they identify with, causing a sense of moral outrage.



# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment

1. A **fascination with violence** is a risk factor that at least half of those experience while planning their attacks. When engaged in a VRA, there should be a careful exploration of the subject's investment, obsession, or fixation on violence. This could include studying past attacks, watching media that shows sensationalized violence against particular groups, drawing pictures or writing essays with similar themes.
2. The **desire for fame** is present as a motivating factor for this kind of targeted violence. Those who feel marginalized, bullied, teased, or isolated expressed a desire for attention and seek retribution for this perceived injustice.
3. As part of the escalation on the pathway, attackers often engage in **objectification and depersonalization** toward their target. They may use hostile language, insulting, images or diminishing/misogynistic objectification focused on separating themselves from their target.

## Environmental Factors

1. **Catalyst events** occur when there is a significant loss that occurs in a person's life that causes an escalation in attacker planning. This could be anything the person holds dear in their life such as failing a particularly important class, losing a romantic relationship, being fired from a job, being involved in domestic abuse, drug use, or criminal charges, or the death of a close friend or family member.
2. The experience of **teasing and bullying** are additional escalating factors for the attacker. Bullying and teasing may be physical, social, property, or cyber. About 1/3 of attackers in their study engaged in bullying, often as part of a persistent pattern of behavior which lasted for weeks, months, or years.
3. **Free fall** describes a wide range of problems an attacker may experience in their community, school, work, primary support group, and/or social circle. For those in a free fall, there is little hope for improvement and this often leads to further isolation, suicidality and feelings of despair. As problems spiral (conflicts in the home, academic, legal or disciplinary actions, or other personal issues), there is little preventing them from looking for an escape.
4. When there is a rapid or intense **decrease in academic or work progress**, this can be a catalyst event and lead to further escalation. In many attack cases, the loss of academic or workplace connection becomes the final straw that overwhelms the individual and moves them closer to an attack. Failure to progress in work and school can directly contribute to other areas of life beginning to become unstable.
5. The **social isolation** that occurs when the person has vastly different beliefs from the majority and/or when they see increases in teasing and bullying, is another cause for escalation. This isolation makes the potential attacker feel alone in their thinking and that violence as the only way to be seen. This isolation is often observed by those around the attacker as they isolate themselves, withdrawing from others, appearing sad, or crying.



# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment

## Protective Factors

- 1. Environmental and Emotional Stability:** Environmental and emotional stability occur when an individual's life experiences have consistency and constancy, and their reactions to change or crisis represent a similar calm and resilience. This is an indication that there are less elements pulling them toward creating disruption in the status quo through violent action. Here, the overall environment in which the person operates is positive without dramatic shifts. The person has stable employment and/or academic enrollment, and they are engaged in these professional or academic arenas. There have not been recent terminations or suspensions, and the family or home environment is generally stable and healthy. The person is not challenged by instability in their situation. They are connected and progressing toward academic or professional goals.
- 2. Social Health and Connection:** A second protective factor relates to stability in relationships with family, friends, and significant others. The person feels socially connected in healthy and positive ways. They feel safe in their own skin, and do not feel marginalized or discriminated against based on their identity or identity group. They are surrounded by others where they can be themselves, feel accepted, and are not judged for their beliefs or circumstance. They feel emotionally connected to those around them which girds against a desire to harm or threaten.
- 3. Access to Non-Violent Outlets:** Having access to alternative, non-violent courses of action is an important protective factor. Individuals have opportunities for positive collective action on issues and concerns instead of turning to violence. Especially when considering written threat, it's important to consider if this is someone seeking a safe space to communicate and discuss issues of concern or radical ideas about improving the way the world works.
- 4. Empathy and Connection:** The empathetic or compassionate person demonstrates the ability to consider other's perspectives or other's ideals without seeing them as challenging or competitive to his or her own beliefs. This can manifest itself as tolerance and an appreciation of diverse perspectives as well. Empathy can be experienced when thinking about people who live differently than us, engaging with other cultures and confronting our own biases, as well as learning to listen to other's perspectives and collaborating with them.
- 5. Positive Social and Individual Action:** Here, we see someone who is engaged in positive social action for the betterment of a group or community or even at a lesser developmental place of just positive action for the sake of their own individual consequence. The second is fairly simple. This individual has an awareness of how their choices result in positive or negative consequence minimally for themselves or those in their circle, and thus, chooses actions to avoid harm. On a higher level, positive social action includes a more inclusive and collaborative participation working together to improve situations, remove barriers to success, and foster positive change. This level of critical thinking, awareness of others, and inclusivity truly reflect the opposite of violent action and the risk factors.



# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment

We are more effective in our management of crises when we consider individual differences.



**Cultural competence** is the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from different cultures and beliefs than your own.

Teams should be diverse in gender identity, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, political affiliation, religious beliefs, physical and mental disability, and age.



## What is Bias?

Bias is our tendency to see the world from our particular lens of experience. It can lead us to ignore the evidence or make assumptions not based on evidence. It can impact what we remember and what witnesses remember. It can create blinders for BIT team members and impact their

ability to build rapport, connect, and create safe/neutral spaces. While we can never remove bias, we can train to make us more aware of how bias can affect decision making.

## Types of Bias

- **Confirmation Bias:** Form an early hypothesis and tend to seek or overvalue evidence that fits it or confirms it. Are you interviewing or validating?
- **Dunning-Kruger Effect:** People who are terrible at a particular task think they are much better than they are, while people who are very good at it tend to underestimate their competence.
- **Anchor Bias:** The tendency to rely too heavily on the first piece of information we are given about a topic.
- **In Group/Out Group:** The tendency to be favorable toward the group that is similar to you.
- **Blind Spot:** Ability to spot systematic errors in others' decisions.
- **Availability Bias:** Reliance upon readily available (most recent) information.

## Where does bias come from?

- Gender, gender identity experiences, and sexual orientation
- Race/ethnicity, world view, and generational expectations
- Mental illness or physical disabilities
- Different cultures or geographic areas
- Veteran history; and religious or political experiences
- Economic differences; and friend or peer groups



# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment

## Microaggressions

Brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership.

- **Microassaults:** Conscious and intentional actions or slurs, such as using racial epithets, displaying swastikas or deliberately serving a white person before a person of color in a restaurant.
- **Microinsults:** Verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity. An example is an employee who asks a colleague of color how she got her job, implying she may have landed it through an affirmative action or quota system.
- **Microinvalidations:** Communications that subtly exclude, negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color. For instance, white people often ask Asian-Americans where they were born, conveying the message that they are perpetual foreigners in their own land.

### Five steps to address microaggressions:

1. Constant vigilance of your own biases and fears
2. Experiential reality; interacting with those different from you in terms of race, culture, and ethnicity
3. Don't be defensive
4. Be open to discussing your own attitudes and biases
5. Be an ally, stand personally against all forms of biases and discrimination

### To respond when accused of microaggressions:

1. Commit to a constant vigilance of your own biases and fears
2. Experience their reality. Find ways to interacting with those different from you in terms of race, culture, and ethnicity
3. Don't be defensive
4. Be open to discussing your own attitudes and biases
5. Be an ally, stand personally against all forms of biases and discrimination

### Ways to expand your understanding:

Engage actively in learning about other's experiences. Nurture a curiosity of other's experiences while limiting your assumptions. Avoid seeing those different from you as having a duty or responsibility to educate you about their heritage, culture or group experience. Our role as allies is firmly seated in a personal responsibility to seek knowledge without making it the job of those who have been marginalized to teach us. We should each have a general understanding of experiences common to certain groups, but should not assume that the issues common to a certain group have been important to or experienced by a member of that population.

### Consider these questions to reflect on or ask:

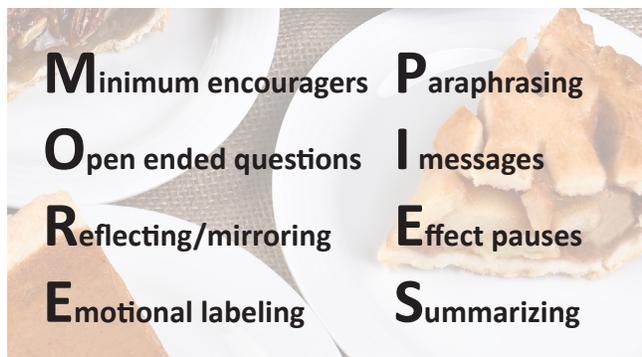
- Where does the individual identify as home?
- How are concepts such as community, family, extended family, holidays, politics, and religion viewed?
- What is his or her first language?
- How were expectations set around dating and relationships in their life?
- What are some recurrent fears, worries or anxieties they having living in the United States?

# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment

## Building Rapport

### Build a Strong Bridge of Connection

- **Smile.** This is a universal gesture of goodwill regardless of culture, nationality, or religion. Research indicates that individuals who receive a smile from another feel accepted and not judged.
- **Listen carefully.** Most people do not listen to each other in an open and patient manner. If the interviewer is attentive, is nonjudgmental, and shows interest in other people, a very positive emotional dynamic will be put in place, even if the interviewee is very distrustful and hates what the interviewer represents (e.g., the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Americans).
- **Find something in common.** Identify a characteristic that is shared between the interviewer and interviewee and point that out. It could be marriage, a child, a common geographical area visited, a certain amount of education, or interest in a certain sport. Find it and say it.
- **Mirror the interviewee.** This refers to mimicking the interviewee's body language and words, which takes attention and practice. If it is done too obviously, it will be noticed and rapport will not arise. It may mean sitting the same way, making similar gestures, using some of the same words, even using similar emotional tones of voice.
- **Avoid blunders.** Allowing the soles of one's shoes to face another person is considered an insult in the Arabic culture. Displaying a cold and unfriendly demeanor is considered an insult. Conveying impatience, such as glancing at one's watch or tapping one's fingers on the table, is considered an insult. Certain gestures may be an insult. Study the culture and know what the blunders are.
- **Find hooks, beware of barbs.** Hooks bring us closer together (common interests, similar backgrounds). Barbs drive us apart, raising defensiveness.



# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment

## Assessing Truthfulness

- **Credibility Assessment:** A credibility assessment determines how believable an individual's prior statements and testimony are. Credibility assessments are used more in legal settings to determine quality of a witness in a proceeding.
- **Deception Detection:** Deception detection makes use of questioning and observation techniques, along with technology that records physiological functions, to assess the likelihood of truth and falsehood in a subject's story.
- **Impression Management:** Impression management, which can be conscious or unconscious, is a process in which people try to control or influence how others perceive them.
- **Faking Good:** Faking good is when a subject attempts to distort their true motives by convincing the evaluator that they are better, or respond to questions in a more socially desirable manner. They may do this to convince the evaluator that they are healthy, well
- **Faking Bad:** Faking bad refers to when a subject attempts to make the evaluator think that the problems they are having are worse than they really are.
- **Halo Effect:** The halo effect is a bias in which our overall impression of a person (a figurative halo) colors our judgment of that person's character. The research into the halo effect shows that a person's positive qualities, physical appearance, and general attractiveness affects how we judge their character — the better they look and behave, the better a person we judge them to be.
- **Microexpressions:** Microexpressions are very brief facial expressions, lasting only a fraction of a second. They occur when a person either deliberately or unconsciously conceals a feeling.

### Friend Signals

- **Eyebrow flash** is a quick up-and-down movement of the eyebrows that lasts about 1/6 of a second.
- **Head tilt** to the left or the right is a nonthreatening gesture.
- **The smile** should be genuine. Insincere smiles tend to be lopsided.
- **Head nodding** communicates to those speaking that they should keep talking.
- **Isopraxism** is mirroring a person's body language.
- **Inward lean** is when people lean toward those they like and away from those they don't.
- **Verbal nudges** reinforce head nodding and encourages the speaker to continue talking.
- **Focused listening** requires those conducting interviews to not let distractions interrupt their attentive listening.

### Foe Signals

- **Elongated stare** or eye contact that lasts more than a second can be read as aggressive.
- **Body scan/elevator eyes** is a head-to-toe gaze and is often seen as intrusive.
- **Eye roll** sends the message that you think the individual is stupid and not worth listening to.
- **Eye squinting, furrowed eyebrows, and facial tension** are associated with disapproval, uncertainty, and anger.



# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment

## Documentation



Don't Be Lavish



Don't Be Sparse



Avoid Technical Language



Beware Emotions



Notes create a history of our analysis and efforts to help the student.



By keeping timely, well-written, non-technical case notes free of emotion, you offer an accurate history of your efforts.



Others can pick up your work where you left off and there is a legal defensibility in well-kept notes to demonstrate your good practice.

## Make a Referral



Counseling



Career Services



Health Care



Academic Support



Faculty



Coaching Staff



Parents



Disability Services



Case Management



Residence Life



Crisis de-escalation needs to offer something different from a “one and done” approach and needs to include referrals and longer term, collaborative interventions that remain in place until the risk has been reduced.

# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment

## Assessing Risk



### Low Risk Path

Low risk path with focus on identifying behaviors and connecting to support.

### Moderate Risk Path

Moderate risk path with focus on setting limits, boundaries and multi-departmental involvement

### High Risk Path

High risk path with progressive discipline, police involvement, and required assessment

The Pathways risk rubric can be used for every case coming before your BIT, CARE, or threat team. Rate each applicable category below on a 3-point scale. If a category does not apply, leave it blank. Click on the category name for scoring guidance. After you submit your ratings, you will be provided a set of intervention recommendations.

Suicide <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Depression <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Self-Injury <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Alcohol/Marijuana <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Substance Abuse <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3
Hallucinations/Delusions <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Anxiety <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Manic Thought/Action <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Loss or Bereavement <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Social Problems <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3
Adjusting to Change <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Financial Insecurity <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Academic/Work Trouble <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Stalking <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Partner Violence <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3
Harassment <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Sexual Assault <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Vandalism <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Affective Violence <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Transient Threats <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3
Substantive Threats <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Hazing/Intimidation <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Incel Behavior <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	White Supremacy <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3	Trolling Actions <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3

Click the category name for level information.

Submit

Reset

# Culturally Competent Threat Assessment



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Author of over a dozen books, Brian has spent time as a child and family therapist, university professor, partner at TNG, and president of NABITA. He currently serves as the assistant deputy director of training at Secure Community Network, which represents the safety and security needs of the Jewish Federation. He is an internationally recognized expert in behavioral intervention, threat assessment, mental illness, and instructional design.



Tammy Hodo, Ph.D.  
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Dr. Hodo has been working in the diversity, equity, and inclusion field for most of her professional career. Being biracial and reared in the Midwest, Tammy learned early on that race, although a social construct, impacts life chances and experiences. She has the lived experience of being both European American and African American. She has written peer-review articles about the experiences of minorities in academia. She owns and operates her own company, All Things Diverse, LLC.