

What is the difference between a psychological assessment and a risk assessment? Who is able to conduct these assessments? What is the most effective delivery of the assessment? These are topics we write about frequently at NaBITA, but one that remains a common question for teams and colleges across the country.

A psychological assessment is more diagnostic-focused, driven by a desire to assess mental health problems and develop a treatment plan, and make a decision about whether a student needs to be in the hospital or on medication. A violence risk or threat assessment is focused on dangerousness, and measures the likelihood of someone acting violently in the near future.

Both of these assessments can be performed either on or off campus. This depends on the campus climate, resources, campus setting (such as rural or urban), and timing needs. A psychological assessment must be conducted by a licensed mental health provider such as a psychologist, master level counselor, alcohol and drug counselor, social worker, or couples and marriage counselor. A violence risk or threat assessment should be conducted by someone with training in the process and who has an ability to build rapport and conduct an interview. These often are campus police, counselors, student conduct staff, or case management staff. Whether on or off campus, the BIT/CARE team needs to vet and ensure the person doing the assessment is 1) answering the questions being asked, and 2) using the appropriate research and process behind the assessment.

These kinds of assessments need to be completed in a timely manner. Holding a student away from school through an interim suspension needs to be just that, interim. When the suspension becomes more than a few days, it becomes an adverse action and begins to have a negative impact on the student's ability to make up work and return. Doing these assessments in-house or establishing an MOU or retainer with local providers can help assure a timely action.

Assessments should be given when more information is required to better understand the issue or threat to self or others. Assessments can be given to help make a decision or to better inform the conduct process. Assessments, whether violence risk or psychological, should only be mandated once the student reaches the elevated stage of the [NaBITA Threat Assessment Tool](#). For students who don't comply with the assessment, the school could see this as a failure to comply within its conduct code.

When done best, assessments seek to build rapport and have a non-adversarial approach between the person doing the assessment and the person being assessed. The goals of the assessment and who will receive the results should be clearly explained and agreed upon by both parties prior to starting the assessment. The phrase "no surprises"



Tip of the Week
July 25, 2018

Risk Assessments and Psychological Assessments

should be a guiding principle for those performing psychological or violence risk assessments.

To learn more about these concepts, consider signing up for a [certification course](#) such as BIT Foundations or BIT Best Practices. Other helpful resources include [Harm to Others: The Assessment and Treatment of Dangerousness](#) and [Best BITs: Topics in Campus Behavioral Intervention & Violence Prevention](#).

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