



AGGRESSION MANAGEMENT INTERVENTION SYSTEM (AMIS)

By: John D. Byrnes, President

1. **Our purpose:** To provide institutions of higher education with the tools to sustain safe and secure campuses by offering a system that prevents and mitigates violent activities (i.e., shootings, bombings, assaults in general).

2. **Our program:** The Center for Aggression Management has developed an **Aggression Management Intervention System (AMIS)**. Based on years of research into aggressive behavior and the development of practical tools to identify, measure, and assess **emerging**¹ human aggression, AMIS is an effective system for achieving maximum campus safety. AMIS has four principle attributes, which are each practical and scalable:

- A) Objective and culturally neutral indicators of potential aggression in place of the current subjective ones.
- B) Measurable quantitative indicators of potential aggression that provide for applied "cause and effect" principles, in place of the current qualitative ones.
- C) Campus-wide approach that enables institutions to prevent violence by getting ahead of threats, rather than the current situation which is too often reactive to committed acts of aggression.
- D) Forensic process with longitudinal tracking that more readily leads to legal defensibility in contrast to the current situation on many campuses where poor communication between departments fails to identify aggressors in a timely basis, which can result in significant lawsuits.

3. **The current state of campus safety:** Institutions of higher education clearly want safe and secure campuses. College administrators are perennially queried by parents and students about the safety of their campuses. The commonplace answers, intended to reassure anxious parents in particular, focus on the campus security force, campus lighting, emergency call boxes placed around the campus, security patrols, and escort services to accompany concerned students. While useful, these efforts do not begin to provide a definitive answer to preventing campus violence, nor do they make a campus safe and secure.

¹ "Emerging" is highlighted to distinguish this method as the only effective means of identifying a potential school shooter before their Moment of Commitment as illustrated in the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education's report on Targeted Violence in Schools.

Traditionally institutions have relied upon the mental health community or campus police to keep campuses safe, yet one of the key shortcomings has been the lack of a system that involved faculty students and staff in the identification and communication process. Recently, more institutions are forming Behavioral Intervention Teams (BIT) with representatives from all these constituencies. A report by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC)² states that 9 out of 10 institutions have changed their safety/security policies, procedures, or systems, yet only a relatively small number have incorporated BITs. This report also finds a large percentage of MHEC member- institutions intend to spend significant funding to put in place many of the physical security tools mentioned in the paragraph above. Sadly, they are reactionary tools and do little to prevent aggression because they are designed only to react to existing conflict, threat and violence. The MHEC members reflect the national blindspot, which prefers hardening targets through enhanced security versus preventing violence with efforts directed at aggressors. Security gets all the focus and money, but this only makes us feel safe, rather than to actually make us safer.

Some campuses today are relying on a law enforcement and/or mental health model of threat assessment to improve campus safety. Yet Brett Sokolow, JD, President of the National Center for Higher Education Risk Management (NCHERM) informs us that existing threat assessment models do not translate easily into the campus setting³.

A) Current Law Enforcement/Campus Police Threat Assessment Models are of limited applicability as follows:

- 1) Law enforcement-based threat assessment models depend at best on sophisticated tools and technology that are not readily adapted outside the law enforcement context, and at worst, on profiling. When effective, they offer insight into potential criminality. However, much of the behavior that falls within the purview of Behavioral Intervention Teams is not criminal in nature.
- 2) Law enforcement officers are restricted to thresholds of "reasonable suspicion" and "probable cause" before they may take any official action beyond a simple conversation. To do so puts the officer and the institution at risk of a lawsuit. Law enforcement threat assessment models tend to address threats to facilities and organizations. That capacity is important, but there must be a broader approach to threat assessment. Threat assessment tools designed to avert terrorist acts or assassinations may be valuable, but do not address the comprehensive issues of violence on campus that rarely involve such actions.

² *The Ripple Effect: Assessing the Nationwide Impact on Campus Safety and Security Policy and Doctrine*

³ Sokolow, Brett A., et al. 2009 NaBITA Whitepaper. *Threat Assessment in the Campus Setting*. www.nabita.org

- 3) In his new well-researched book, *Just 2 Seconds*,⁴ Gavin deBecker illustrates that the span of time from the moment a shooter pulls his/her weapon (Moment of Commitment) to the point when the last round is fired (Moment of Completion) is approximately five seconds to five minutes. The only way a campus can avert a tragic event is to identify this perpetrator prior to his/her Moment of Commitment. Aggression Management Intervention System (AMIS) offers this capability.
- 4) Some law enforcement agencies use profiling as a means to identify an aggressor. According to the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education's report on Targeted Violence in Schools, there is a significant difference between "profiling" and identifying and measuring **emerging**⁴ aggression; *"The use of profiles is not effective either for identifying students who may pose a risk for targeted violence at school or – once a student has been identified – for assessing the risk that a particular student may pose for school-based targeted violence."* It continues; *"An inquiry should focus instead on a student's behaviors and communications to determine if the student appears to be planning or preparing for an attack."* Assessing objective, culturally neutral, identifiable criteria of **emerging** aggression must be our goal. This is the basis for the AMIS methodology, which uses behavior, body language and communication indicators to measure **emerging** aggression.

B) Current Mental Health Threat Assessment Models are of limited applicability:

- 1) Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy, June 13, 2007 states, *"Most people who are violent do not have a mental illness, and most people who have mental illness are not violent."* *"Those with mental illness are more likely to be the victims of violence, not perpetrators,"*⁵
- 2) Colleges and universities historically rely on campus counselors for some measure of insight and analysis of threat assessment. While this function brings a necessary element to the table, it is only part of the overall threat assessment capacity needed, according to Sokolow. In addition, college counseling centers are spread dangerously thin, as institutions are coming to over-rely on their counselors with heavier caseloads and asking

⁴ **"Emerging"** is highlighted to distinguish this method as the only effective means of identifying a potential school shooter before their Moment of Commitment as illustrated in the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education's report on Targeted Violence in Schools.

⁵ Choe, JY., Teplin, LA & Abram, KM. (2008). Perpetration of violence, violent victimization, and severe mental illness: balancing public health concerns. *Psychiatric Services*, 59(2), 153-164.

them to take on an increasingly large number of mental health issues (suicidal students, social skill training, developing outreach programs on health and wellness topics).

- 3) The tools used in the mental health field, often based on actuarial data and academic studies, are essential for assessing the potential for harm to self and suicidality. However, assessing for the potential of harm to others is also an essential element, and in this task campus mental health assessments lack the ability to predict this violence and are therefore not as reliable, according to Brian K. Van Brunt, Ed.D, the Director of Counseling and Testing at Western Kentucky University.
- 4) One must acknowledge not all risks brought to the attention of Behavioral Intervention Teams stem from mental health roots. A more easily obtainable and applicable capacity for assessing the potential of harm to others is needed, according to the Sokolow Whitepaper.
- 5) Aggression Management Intervention System (AMIS) provides this essential capacity outside a mental health framework.

4. Using Behavioral Intervention Teams with law enforcement and mental health models:

Those campuses incorporating internal Behavioral Intervention Teams often find themselves caught between the subjective nature of mental health threat assessment, and the necessary high legal thresholds of law enforcement involvement. Example: A counselor tells you a student “may or may not harm themselves” or avoids the assessment altogether claiming it is outside their ethics or scope or practice. Law enforcement has no probable cause to act. The BIT is caught in the middle with concerned RAs, family, faculty and others depending on the BIT to do something. W. Scott Lewis, JD, a partner at NCHERM, the former Assistant Vice Provost at the University of South Carolina and creator/Director of one of the most effective Behavior Intervention Teams – states that many teams are quickly being overcome by subjective statements made by students and faculty, which is time consuming and overwhelming. The challenges are described as:

- A) These current approaches are highly subjective as they do not use objective, measurable indicators. They are wrought with stereotyping and profiling, and therefore result in far too many false positives.
- B) Each call and stated concern must be thoroughly investigated. In the absence of an objective system, this can easily overwhelm the team’s ability to respond in a timely basis, if at all.

- C) The process is generally reactive to incidents rather than preventive. It does not get out in front of the aggression as needed and does not protect campuses against the horrific Moment of Commitment.
- D) It does not easily achieve legal defensibility of actions taken, and can place the perceived legal necessity *to do something* above what may be in the best interests of the student.

Other suggestions about dealing with campus violence include proposals like that of James Alan Fox in his article "The troubled student and campus violence: new approaches" published in The Chronicle of Higher Education. The steps he advocates include screening graduate students for "personal resourcefulness", withdrawing students when their chances of success appear remote, and ensuring graduate and professional students have mental health insurance coverage.

These and other steps he advocates appear to deal with campus violence as a mental health challenge/management problem, using certain criteria to reject applicants (perceived lack of personal resourcefulness, however that is defined) to eject students (poor/low chance for success) and to set mental health insurance coverage as a prerequisite to entry into certain programs. (Does this mean students without coverage will not be accepted?)

One can easily see the problem is finding objective criteria that can be fairly applied and which do not otherwise discriminate against certain students.

Similar to the futile attempts of James Alan Fox, corporate America has been encumbered for years in trying to profile an aggressor prior to their hiring by virtue of their past history or future propensity to aggress at work.

A Safer Workplace	
METHODS	PITFALLS
Fire dangerous employee	Liabile for discrimination
Give job applicant psychological test	Invasion of privacy
Seek references about past episodes of violence	Reference can be sued for slander
Reduce status due to emotional instability	Americans with Disabilities Act
Check criminal records	Access limited in some states
Do nothing	Liabile if employee becomes violent

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The above Wall Street Journal graphic illustrates the difficulties plaguing corporate America and now academia in its endeavor to identify a potential aggressor prior to admission.

- A) Once a student has been admitted to campus and, in the absence of comprehensive due diligence, the institution now wants their expulsion, that institution can be liable for discrimination.
- B) Requiring a psychological assessment can be seen as an invasion of privacy.
- C) Requesting information from prior institutions may not bear fruit, and many will not respond for fear of an accusation of defamation.
- D) Requiring additional restrictions on students without comprehensive due process can result in an ADA action.
- E) Relatively few of those who have committed overt acts of aggression have criminal records, therefore, requiring a criminal background check does not eliminate the vast majority of aggressors.
- F) Institutions that do nothing to address this emerging problem will most certainly face increasing liability of gross negligence for acts of aggression on their campuses.
- G) We are rapidly losing the strong legal defense that violence was not foreseeable, due in part to AMIS's ability to make aggression more "foreseeable."

Enhanced security and proposals like Fox's are well-meaning and proffered with the best intentions. However, the practicality of implementing such proposals is doubtful, their legal defensibility is low, and their effectiveness in reducing campus violence is small to none.

5. How the Aggression Management Intervention System (AMIS) provides institutions with a safer and more secure campus:

Based on years of research into aggressive behavior, and the development of practical tools to identify, measure, and assess **emerging**⁶ human aggression, AMIS is the most effective system behavioral intervention teams can use to achieve maximum campus safety and security in a practical and scalable way. AMIS consists of three basic components, as follows.

- A) First, AMIS establishes a trained cadre of **First Observers (FOs)** who provide campus-wide eyes and ears in order to identify potential aggressors. These Observers apply objective indicators to measure **emerging** human aggression. The use of "objective indicators" avoids both the stereotyping of individuals as well as

⁶ "Emerging" is highlighted to distinguish this method as the only effective means of identifying a potential school shooter before their Moment of Commitment.

preventing the overwhelming number of subjective sightings, all of which must be investigated. FOs are not new staff, but instead include frontlines security, residential life, facilities, support, faculty and other personnel who are already in positions to observe and report.

- B) The second component is the AMIS software-based **Objective Recording System (ORS)**. The software provides a Dropdown Tool of objective indicators and a recording mechanism for the FO to chronicle the indicators observed. It also records how the third component – the Qualified Responders (QRs) – respond and what their results are. The software makes the process eminently objective because it illustrates “cause and effect” principles and therefore provides a higher level of legal defensibility. ORS also has the capacity for longitudinal tracking of an individual’s behaviors over time, permitting an institution to track emerging aggressive behavior across departments, offices and venues.
- C) The **Qualified Responders (QRs) Training** is the third component. QRs are Behavior Intervention Team (BIT) members who are AMIS trained and certified⁷. Participants learn how to:
1. Evaluate the information made available by the First Observers (FOs);
 2. Objectively assess the level of threat posed by the declared measured indicators;
 3. Decide on what action(s), if any, is to be taken
 4. Approach the perceived potential aggressor in a number of different ways using established and tested methodologies; and
 5. Engage this aggressor with all needed resources at hand.

Upon completion of the intervention, the QR members can then record their engagement and results demonstrating the use of “cause and effect” principles within AMIS’s Objective Recording System (ORS). This helps QR members remain objective, which places them on a path to legal defensibility and offers an extra measure of protection for students, faculty, staff and institutions.

What do QRs know that untrained BIT members do not? They:

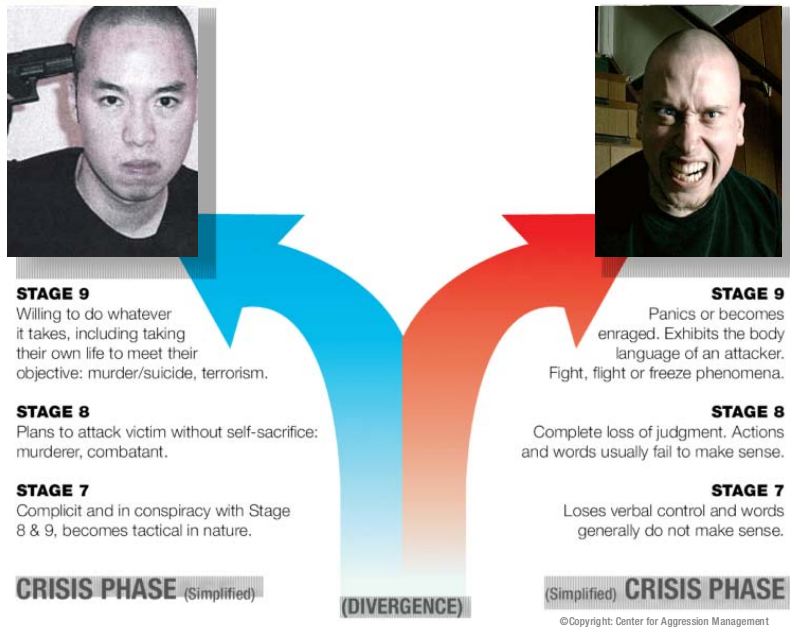
1. Understand the difference between Primal and Cognitive Aggression,
2. Know how to objectively measure aggression, and
3. Know which techniques to deploy to maximize their results.

See the following schematic for an illustration:

⁷ Behavior Intervention Team (BIT) is possibly the most popular phrase used in higher education, though yours may be a CARE Team, SOC or have some other moniker or acronym. Regardless of what you call your team, our intention is to properly train and certify existing BIT members who will then be know as Qualified Responders (QRs) of the Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT).

Cognitive Aggression

Primal Aggression



Can a college or university identify someone who intends to do harm on their campus? The horrific shootings at Virginia Tech (VT) and subsequently, Northern Illinois University (NIU) demonstrate the need to understand the critical difference between two dramatically different kinds of aggression. Typically, campus security and law enforcement officers are trained to look for the “Primal Aggressor” (red-faced and ready to explode) when in fact these school and campus shooters, are almost always classic “Cognitive Aggressors” (cold, completely detached and determined). If weapons were not visible, the VT and NIU shooters probably could have walked right by most campus police officers without being noticed. The Primal Aggressor is the person who loses control, possibly from an escalation of anger. The Cognitive Aggressor is a far more dangerous and elusive predator.

It is not instinctual for one human-being to attack another; an aggressor must disconnect, depersonalize, and turn his or her victim into an object⁸. As any human escalates up the Aggression Continuum, their body language and behavior expresses this disconnection with their victim. In the extreme, when an aggressor decides to give up their life for a cause (murder/suicide – VT Shooter/NIU Shooter) they also disconnect from their own well-being. One can observe in this level of aggressor the *thousand-yard stare* and watch as their whole body and behaviors lose animation. This behavior and body language is predictable in all humans. It does not matter what culture, gender, education, age or hierarchy – virtually all humans respond with the same culturally neutral indicators. Perpetrators of murder/suicide present themselves as calm, deliberate and focused aggressors with no remorse or compunction about multiple killings without regard for age or gender.

While a Primal Aggressor can become lethal in the extreme, they typically can be defused, whereas Cognitive Aggressors become tactical and extremely lethal.

⁸ *On Killing, the Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman

In the AMIS system, students, RAs, faculty, staff, and campus security personnel become the frontlines for identifying these lethal Cognitive Aggressors. They must learn the measurable indicators that describe them. They must learn the techniques to defuse them.

6. An Example of AMIS at work

An individual is walking across the campus of a large state university. A member of the First Observers (FOs) – and there are many on campus – observes some of the indicators that illustrate this individual might be a potential aggressor. AMIS's Cognitive Aggressors provide specific body language, behavioral and communication indicators that can identify one of five levels of risk from "mild" to "extreme". The First Observer (FO) immediately relays this information through the Objective Recording System (ORS) to an on duty Qualified Responder (QR). These objective indicators are recorded on the AMIS Dropdowns Tool, providing an accurate measurement of **emerging** aggression and the level of threat posed by this aggression. One or more Qualified Responders (QRs) who are on duty can then objectively evaluate the level of threat and decide whether to take action, and if so, what action. These Qualified Responders can ask First Observers for more information before arriving at a course of action, which ranges from no action to a variety of interventions, including the arrest of a the suspect who rises to the "probable cause" threshold of law enforcement.

The same process is followed in classrooms, residence halls, dining halls, stadiums, etc. – wherever an aggressive action can occur on campus. The International Association of Assembly Managers (IAAM) has expressed a growing alarm by university stadium managers that aggressive behavior among fans is causing an increasing number of fans to stay away from sporting events, preferring to experience them on high definition 52 inch screens in the comfort and safety of their own homes. The goal of the AMIS process is to prevent violence and aggression in most any form, through the identification of the potential aggressor and timely intervention by certified personnel.

The system is designed to provide objective documentation and the capacity for longitudinal tracking of an individual's behaviors over time. This can ultimately achieve legal defensibility, prevent or mitigate aggressive acts and ensure a safer and more secure campus.

7. Training the teams:

AMIS provides training on your campus, at regional events and in online courses with sequential assessments as prerequisites. In this way an institution will be assured each certified participant is fully competent at their requisite skills. FOs are usually trained online, or by QRs who have gone through the AMIS Certification Course, though live training is available. Qualified Responders are always trained in-person, with a training utilizing role play, table top exercises and online exercises, preparing them to respond to potentially intense circumstances in the most professional manner.

Program One: Objective Recording System (ORS) Training:

Objective Recording System (ORS) is:

1. Designed as a threat assessment tool for Qualified Responders (QRs).
2. A *dropdown method*⁹ of delineation, which guides a Qualified Responder through an interview with a First Observer.
3. A tool that enables the Qualified Responder to confirm they have a well-defined, comprehensive and deliberate sighting using culturally neutral and measurable indicators.
4. A tool that provides First Observers with the platform to learn how to use the AMIS Dropdown Tool so as to describe in objective terms what they observe.
5. A method that permits QRs to identify any needed resources outside their BIT Core Team whether on and off campus.
6. A method that permits data collection and distribution for longitudinal tracking through specified channels for expert analysis, compilation and reporting.

Once QRs have engaged a potential aggressor, ORS is:

7. A platform for QRs to record their encounter, demonstrating their objectivity.
8. A tool that provides data recording, tracking and controlling outcomes. This capacity for longitudinal tracking will aid in demonstrating legal defensibility for actions taken.
9. A reference and link to all appropriate training: First Observer (FO) Training, QR Training and ORS Training.

This one-day in-depth training program is part of the Qualified Responders (QRs) training and provides comprehensive understanding of our Objective Recording System (ORS) Tool. This program will provide the many applications and advantages of an objective, forensic process and longitudinal tracking centered on *prevention* effectiveness and the opportunity to achieve legal defensibility of actions taken. With the following scope:

1. How a QR member will interview a First Observer (FO) to maximize information taken. Learning the AMIS Dropdown System and filling in the gaps.
2. How to use the ORS as a reference tool before engaging a potential aggressor.
3. Understanding the logistics:
 - a. Identifying the First Observer (FOs) and how to reconnect.

⁹ Aggression Management Intervention System (AMIS) Dropdown Tool

- b. Identifying the whereabouts of the potential aggressor
- c. Using our AMIS Dropdown System for delineating potential aggression
- d. Accessing information from and to campus security
- e. Accessing information from and to mental health
- f. Accessing supplemental resources when needed
- g. Watching for "cause and effect" results
- h. Controlling outcomes, follow up tickler system
- i. Developing reports and conducting analysis
- j. Pursuing legal defensibility
- k. Learning how to utilize search tools and who may have access

Program Two: First Observers (FOs)

This FOs' one-day workshop provides comprehensive coverage illustrating the distinction between AMIS's Primal (adrenaline-driven) Aggression and Cognitive (intent-driven) Aggression.

Within this program, participants will learn measurable (body language, behavior and communication) indicators that can help QRs (trained BIT members) identify aggressors before they effect their terror, prior to their Moment of Commitment. Participants will learn these measured and objective indicators as well as the means to transfer this information through AMIS's sophisticated Objective Recording System (ORS) in a forensic procedure of sharing, which can permit Qualified Responders (QRs) to engage the prospective aggressor with the intent to prevent potential aggression. If prevention is not available, the QRs will focus on defusing this aggressor and if defusing is not available, these measurable indicators will assist the Qualified Responders (QRs)/campus police to bring the full resources both on and off the campus to bear to mitigate the possibility of a horrific attack. It is not the objective of this course that a First Observer (FOs) should engage an aggressor. Alternatively, these skills will promote and offer methods for a First Observer (FOs) and those in their care to remove themselves as a target of an aggressor.

There are four types of distinct First Observer (FOs) audiences:

- Students at large
- Student Leaders (RA's, Orientation Leaders, Athletic Team Captains, etc.)
- Staff (Student Affairs, Student Conduct, Resident Directors, Law Enforcement, etc.)
- Faculty and Academic Affairs staff

Those who complete the course successfully receive a Certificate as a First Observer (FOs). Each FO also receives a FO lapel pin, permitting those around them to use them as reference for any suspicious and threatening behavior.

Program Three: Qualified Responders (QRs)

This five-day, in-depth, face-to-face training (including ORS training) provides comprehensive coverage illustrating the distinction between AMIS's Primal (adrenaline-driven) Aggression and the Cognitive (intent-driven) Aggression. Adjunct to this face-to-face training is ORS training for QRs. In the face-to-face training, participants learn to

understand the implications of these culturally-neutral, measurable Primal and Cognitive Aggression indicators; how to engage a potential aggressor in the most effective way and prevent aggression at all levels. After 2½-days of content training, there are 2½ more days of intensive skills-application and exercises including practice-role-playing and assessment. Much as each institution determines which individuals will participate as BIT members, so will they determine who will be their Qualified Responders (QRs). We recommend representatives from Student Affairs, Mental and Behavioral Health and Campus Police as core participants on any Qualified Responders' Behavioral Intervention Team.

With the following focus:

1. Based on measured culturally-neutral indicators, how to maximize their engagement creating the best possible – best practices – response to prevent, to defuse, or to mitigate aggression.
2. Customize our methodology for each campus, designed to address a legal cross-examination by utilizing a forensic objective process which can be easily documented and referenced.
3. Participants will learn about the Core Team and how to utilize Supplemental Resources outside their Core Team (on or off campus) to maximize results in a professional way.
4. Discuss the role of campus police, mental health counselors, etc.
5. Discussion of Reasonable Suspicion. (The Supreme Court has held that police may briefly detain a person if they have a reasonable suspicion the person has committed, is committing, or is about to commit a crime. This reasonable suspicion must be based on "specific and articulable facts" and not merely upon an officer's hunch.)
6. Participants learn the appropriate application of HIPAA and FERPA regulations within the Aggression Management Intervention System (AMIS).
7. Using our Objective Recording System (ORS), participants learn how to reference, report, track, develop constructive outcomes and compile data collection with a focus on legal defensibility.
8. How to interview a First Observer (FO) to maximize collected information.

Those who complete the program successfully receive a Certificate as Qualified Responders. QRs also receive a QR lapel pin, permitting those around them to use them as a resource for any suspicious and threatening behavior.

For more information or to sign up for training, contact John D. Byrnes, President of the Center for Aggression Management at 407-718-5637 or JohnByrnes@AggressionManagement.com or visit our web site at www.AggressionManagement.com.