

# Police shot 'vulnerable' teen six times

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ON THE evening Tyler Cassidy, 15, died he texted an ominous message to a friend: "WORST MOOD EVER."

Within hours he had stolen two kitchen knives from Kmart and was allegedly threatening himself or police during a violent standoff in a skate park that resulted in him being shot by police.

An inquest yesterday aired details of a flurry of agitated and sometimes angry text messages from Tyler to friends and family, including one to his older brother Blake about 20 minutes before Tyler died.

It read in part: *'just rember I love ... mum and r 2 week for this life'*.

*"Blake thought Tyler was going to kill himself,"* said Fiona Ellis, counsel assisting the coroner in an opening address outlining the chronology of the night of December 11, 2008.

The conduct of the police who confronted Tyler, whose unstable behaviour at Northcote Plaza on the night of the shooting was the subject of multiple calls to police or emergency services, will be under scrutiny during the five-week hearing before Judge Jennifer Coate.

The officers involved - **Sergeant Colin Dods**, Senior Constable Richard Blundell, Senior Constable Nicole De Propertis and Senior Constable Antonia Ferrante - were present at the inquest, which began yesterday. Ms Ellis said that, according to the police, when they arrived at the shopping centre they confronted Tyler and urged him to drop the knives.

In witness statements, **police say** Tyler responded: *"You are going to have to kill me", "you are going to have to shoot me", and "I'll hurt you. I'll f---en kill you"*.

**Tyler was twice sprayed with capsicum spray**, but it had little effect, **police said** in their statements.

*"According to Dods, he discharged a single shot into the ground as a warning,"* Ms Ellis said. *"Tyler kept advancing and Dods said that he was extremely fearful for his safety."*

She said **Sergeant Dods said he fired another two shots into Tyler's thighs.** *"According to Dods, as Tyler continued to advance he took aim at his chest area and kept firing until he went to the ground."*

Senior constables Blundell and De Propertis said they also fired shots in defence of Sergeant Dods. **In total, six of 10 bullets fired hit the teenager.**

Tyler is believed to be the youngest person shot dead by police in Australia. The court heard that the event had taken a heavy toll on Tyler's family.

While his mother, Shani Cassidy, and brother would be taking the stand as witnesses, Mrs Cassidy's fiance, Greg Taylor, did not feel he was capable of giving testimony.

It has emerged, however, that aspects of two statements Mr Taylor provided to the inquest contradict details presented by Mrs Cassidy in her statements.

The inquest heard that in his first statement, Mr Taylor said that since Tyler's father's death from cancer his mother had had a hard time trying to keep Tyler "on the rails". In the past the boy had threatened to kill Mrs Cassidy with a knife, but she had managed to calm him down.

On the night Tyler died, Mr Taylor said he had opened the front door to him after he had been out with friends and heard him tell his mother he *"was going to kill someone or that someone was going to kill him"*.

In a second statement, lodged a couple of months later, Mr Taylor said Tyler had never said he was going to kill himself or police. *"Just that the police were after him."*

It emerged yesterday that 11 days after his father died in 2004, Tyler had walked out of his school and lain down on Alexander Parade, Fitzroy, saying he "wanted to be run over by a car and be killed".

Jane Dixon, SC, for the family, reminded the court that the proceedings were not a trial of the teenager's life or character. **"Tyler is not on trial, his life is not on trial and his family is not on trial,"** she said.