



Memo To: GHD staff and residence life response personnel

From: Mark Bauman

Re: Parents/Guardians making threatening statements towards students or staff

Date: October 25, 2007

This SOP is intended to clarify the procedures to be used when a parent/guardian or other party makes threatening statements directed towards students or staff.

Residence life personnel have noticed an increase in parents/guardians making threatening statements towards students. Often these statements are related to residential conflicts that involve their student – the threatening statements are thus directed towards other students believed to be the cause of the conflict. Generally, threatening comments are made out of frustration or anger. It is quite common for these statements to be retracted, with the individual sometimes apologizing for the comment.

However, any threatening statement directed towards a student from a parent/guardian must be taken seriously, even if the comment is eventually retracted. To this end, please adhere to the following procedures concerning these types of incidents.

1. If a threatening statement is made, seek clarification. Ask questions like: *“Excuse me, can you please repeat what you just said?”* You want to be sure you heard the individual correctly. If they hesitate, you can paraphrase what you just heard. For example: *“Sir, I believe you made a reference to harming a student.”* Note that it is not necessary to repeat their comment word for word – just the general intent of their comment reflected back to them will suffice. At this point, it is also important to assess their tone, frustration level and other corresponding emotions. You are striving for a “big picture” perspective and how this relates to the words the individual just used.
2. Wait for their response. They might apologize; they might not. Some become emboldened and some retract their comment with some embarrassment. Your response is contingent upon how they react.
 - **If the conversation continues to deteriorate**, or the parent does not retract their comment, you will need to end this conversation and report the matter to your supervisor and to the University Police. Thus, it is appropriate for you to state to the individual: *“Sir, it is apparent that you are very upset about this situation, and you’ve made some threatening comments towards a Bloomsburg student. At this point, I’m going to need to turn this over to my supervisor and also notify the University Police.”* End the conversation and report the matter immediately to the University Police and your supervisor. If it is after work hours, report the matter to the professional campus contact.
 - **If the conversation improves**, and the parent/guardian retracts their statement, you may continue. However, following the incident reporting guidelines stated below. It is still very important to document this situation and route this report to the appropriate personnel. Even if the comment is retracted, it is appropriate for you to comment on the threatening statement. For example: *“Sir, it appears that you didn’t mean to say that, but you have to understand that we take comments like*

that very seriously. For my purposes, I need to be certain that you do not intend to follow-through with the threatening gesture you just made.” And then continue the conversation, processing the comment in the best manner possible.

3. Whether you end or continue the conversation, reporting this matter quickly and accurately is critical. Therefore, be aware of the following elements in regards to reporting a situation of this nature:
 - As with any parent/guardian phone calls, having a note pad within your immediate reach is important. During the conversation, you’ll want to write down as much as you can recall, using their words as much as possible.
 - Also make notes with regards to the individual’s emotional state and other variables: raised voice, yelling, profanity, are they in route to the campus, etc. All of these factors contribute to the seriousness of the matter and should provide you with insight in regards to its resolution (i.e. end the call and act or continue the call).
 - **If you end the call because the individual will not de-escalate**, type a campus contact report immediately and route this in accordance with standard procedures. HOWEVER – also notify your supervisor during working hours (after hours, notify the professional campus contact). AND notify the University Police. Both notifications should be done via phone or in person and within minutes of ending the conversation. Once notified, you will collaborate with the professional and University Police in regards to what action, if any, is to be taken.
 - If you end the call in a normal manner (i.e. the person retracted their comments) you will still report the matter using your campus contact protocol shortly after the conclusion of the call. You should still verbally inform your supervisor or the professional campus contact.

As with any matter involving the potential health, safety or welfare of students or staff, you should be collaborating and discussing with your supervisor. Never hesitate to contact anyone for advisement or consultation. Although the likelihood of a parent/guardian actually following-through on a threat is small, it is still vital that we take these matters seriously.