D·PREP
SAFETY DIVISION

Feeling Threatened Vs. Being Threatened: Understanding Threat in Higher Education

With special thanks to Dr. Brian Van Brunt, Jennifer Adams, Dr. Lisa Pecara-Kovach, and Bethany Smith for their contributions.

Introduction

In higher education, the distinction between *feeling threatened and being threatened* has long been a source of discussion. The nuance between perception and reality carries significant implications for policy and practice. Misinterpreting an individual's intent has the potential to disrupt the accuracy of the threat assessment process. Within this resource paper, we explore what the difference between feeling threatened and being threatened means for students, faculty, and administrators in practice. Our goal is to help our community understand the various types of threats, including concerning and disruptive speech, on-campus violations of the student code of conduct, or more serious violations of the state criminal code related to terrorist threats, as responding to them effectively is critical to de-escalation and placement of the most effective support services.

When faculty and staff encounter threatening speech, behavior, or writing, they are faced with supporting individuals who are often scared, emotional, and in a reactive state. In this state of heightened emotions, they may struggle to view the issue from a logical or solution-focused perspective. Too often, educators, school leaders, and administrators attempt to throw quick solutions at the problem or convince the scared and worried staff or students that "there is nothing we can do." Those responsible for addressing the situation may suggest to the reporting person that they are overreacting. While both responses may be technically true, they are wholly unhelpful when attempting to calm a staff or faculty member who is scared about a threat they genuinely believe to be real.

The reality is, many threats are driven by frustration, anger, or distress rather than a genuine intent to harm someone else. Thinking about this in terms of a "fight, flight, or freeze" example helps understand the context of how a particular threat occurred. It is the emotional perceptions of danger that are more subjective, based on personal experience or a bias related to groups or behaviors.

Disruptive behavior, heightened emotions, and perceived threats create a heightened sense of worry and concern in the reporting student, faculty member, or staff member, who fears either they or someone else will be harmed. While feelings of being threatened can be subjective, they are upsetting and concerning for the person involved. The core of this resource paper is how to help faculty, staff, and even other students who feel threatened. By addressing these behaviors and threats in a manner that honors, but does not necessarily agree with, the emotional response of the reporter, we can prevent unnecessary suspensions/arrests for impulsive, non-serious remarks, keeping our focus on resources and genuine threats. Importantly, we can better focus early intervention efforts through behavioral support for the person about whom they are concerned.

The team authoring this paper includes well-known experts in the field of threat assessment and workplace violence prevention, with extensive experience consulting for organizations, including universities, law enforcement, and corporations. Our work bridges practical threat management strategies with behavioral science to improve safety in educational and professional environments. We've authored numerous articles, books, and delivered talks that distill complex threat assessment concepts into actionable guidance. Our consulting work helps institutions develop threat management policies and protocols tailored to their unique environments.

Some key aspects of our work on threat assessment include:

- **Focus on Behavioral Indicators**: We emphasize identifying behavioral warning signs rather than relying solely on explicit verbal threats. We review and address how seemingly minor or ambiguous behaviors can escalate into serious risks if misinterpreted or unaddressed.
- **Insider Threat Awareness:** A significant part of our work focuses on insider threats: individuals within an organization who may pose risks due to grievance, stress, or other factors. We highlight the importance of recognizing patterns such as workplace conflict, withdrawal, and changes in behavior, work performance, or academic success.
- **Threat Assessment as a Multidisciplinary Process**: Our team advocates for collaborative teams involving security, human resources, mental health professionals, and leadership to conduct threat assessments, in addition to a clear reporting system. This multidisciplinary approach improves accuracy and ensures a balanced response.
- **Training and Education:** We develop training programs aimed at frontline supervisors, employees, and campus personnel to help them recognize, report, and respond to concerning behavior early. We focus on empowering bystanders to act.
- **Early Intervention and Prevention:** Our approach stresses early intervention, addressing concerning behavior before it escalates into violence. We promote the use of evidence-based assessment tools and supportive interventions, rather than relying solely on punitive measures.
- **Case Study Analysis:** Our team frequently uses detailed case studies, such as workplace violence incidents and school shootings, to illustrate warning signs, risk factors, and missed opportunities for intervention. We stress prevention and intervention rather than profiling.

Our goal is to clarify these concepts related to threat in further detail, reduce unnecessary fear, and promote effective threat assessment and intervention. We aim to identify and address the complications that arise from misinterpreting threats. Misunderstanding threats by jumping to quick conclusions or actions can lead to overreaction, underreaction, or infringing on the rights of others. To begin this discussion, we will review the Free Speech implications related to threat assessment.

Free Speech

It is essential to examine the role of free speech in the context of threats. The First Amendment protects most speech, including speech that may be offensive, controversial, or provocative. However, "true threats" (statements where the speaker means to communicate a serious intent to commit violence) are not protected**.** Colleges must carefully differentiate between speech that expresses frustration, hyperbole, or opinion (referred to as "barks" or transient threats) and speech that constitutes a genuine threat of harm (referred to as "bites" or substantive threats). The concept of barks versus bites is addressed more fully further in this document.

Overly broad or vague threat policies risk chilling free speech by punishing students for joking, venting, or discussing controversial topics. Students may self-censor, which stifles healthy debate, dialogue, and academic freedom. Campus administrators must strike a balance between safety and fostering an environment where diverse and even uncomfortable viewpoints can be openly discussed. Students have the right to due process when accused of making threats, including clear definitions and evidence-based threat assessments. Policies should clearly define what constitutes a true threat to prevent arbitrary or discriminatory enforcement. Transparent procedures protect both campus safety and individual rights.

When addressing threats on campus, context matters. The context in which a statement is made (such as a heated argument, artistic expression, political speech, or venting) strongly influences whether it qualifies as a threat. Free speech protections generally strengthen when speech occurs in academic or expressive settings. Colleges have a legal and ethical obligation to protect community safety while respecting constitutional rights. Implementing evidence-based threat assessment (like Cornell's or Tau's frameworks) helps focus on actual risk rather than perceived offense. This balanced approach strikes a middle ground, avoiding the unnecessary punishment of speech while preventing violence.

Campus policies and CARE/BIT teams should educate students on responsible communication, the difference between free speech and threats, and the consequences of threatening behavior. Empowering students to speak up about real concerns, while understanding limits, supports both safety and free expression. Students should be empowered through knowing to whom and what to report.

Balancing Safety and Rights

Faculty and staff often encounter speech or behavior that feels uncomfortable but is not, by law or policy, a true threat. The goal is to train the campus community to distinguish between *discomfort* (a subjective, emotional reaction) and *danger* (an objective, evidence-based risk). Consider the following set of questions as a practical lens through which to view this issue.

If a student says, "I'm going to fail this test and that will be the end of me," this is best described as a lawful speech as it contains hyperbolic self-expression with no plan or actionability. Similarly, statements like "If the Wi-Fi goes out again, I'm going to lose my mind" or "I can't stand this place today" are either venting about a frustration or an expression of displeasure. Political commentary may include extreme language, but it does not meet the legal standard for incitement to violence. In the same framework, a heated argument in class where a student raises

their voice in support of a political or religious ideology does not constitute a threat even if others disagree with the statement.

In *Counterman v. Colorado* (2023), the Supreme Court ruled that a "true threat" isn't just about how words are received; the speaker must have at least acted with recklessness, knowingly ignoring a real risk their words would be taken as a serious intent to harm. This draws a bright line between heat-of-the-moment venting ("If my roommate doesn't wash his dishes, I'm going to lose it") and targeted, menacing statements ("I know where you live and I'm coming tonight"). Using this standard helps campuses focus on actual threats while protecting lawful speech, even when that speech makes people uneasy.

Campus policies and BIT teams should also educate students on responsible communication, the difference between free speech and threats, and the consequences of threatening behavior. Empowering students to speak up about genuine concerns, while acknowledging limitations such as innate biases, supports both safety and free expression. This is particularly warranted in the lead-up to controversial speakers or protests on campus.

ASK	CHECK	CONTEXT
Is there a clear, specific expression of intent to harm a person or group?	Is there evidence of planning, capability, or steps toward carrying out that harm?	Was this said in a debate, a joke, a moment of frustration, or as artistic or political expression?

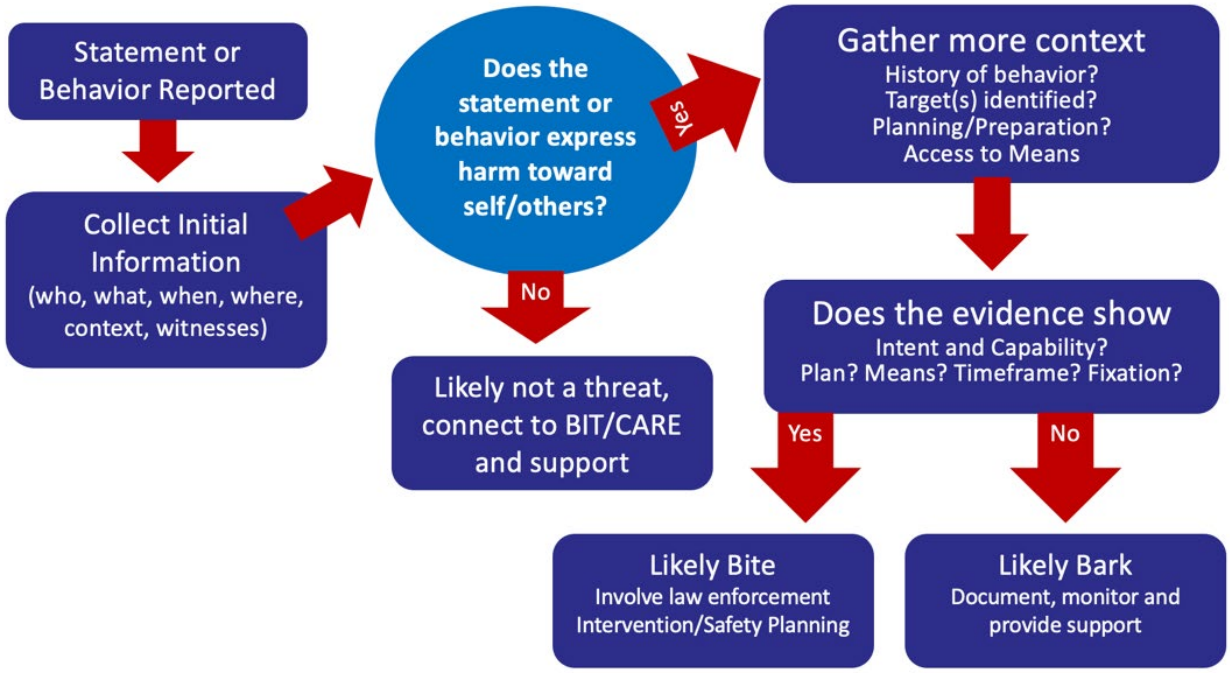
Bark vs. Bite

Forensic psychologist Dr. Manny Tau[1] explores the difference between statements or behaviors that sound threatening ("bark") and those that truly indicate danger ("bite"). His primary goal is to help schools, workplaces, and law enforcement agencies better distinguish between perceived threats and genuine risks. He explains barks as verbal statements, gestures, or behaviors that may be alarming but are not necessarily predictive of harm. In contrast, bites are clear actions, planning, or patterns that signal intent and capability to cause harm. Overreacting to barks can consume limited resources and damage trust. Underreaction to bites can lead to tragic circumstances. The key to safety is not treating every loud bark as a deadly bite, but also not ignoring the quiet individuals who are preparing to attack. Effective threat management lives in the careful, evidence-based space between fear and complacency.

[1] Tao, M. (2017). Bark v's bite: When is a threat really a threat? [Video]. TEDxMissionViejo. https://www.ted.com/tedx

Bark Sounds alarming, but poses a low intent/risk	**Bite** Contains clear intent/capability, higher risk
"I'm so done with this class, I could just kill this project." *(said while laughing with friends)*	"I'm going to hurt my roommate tonight, and I already bought a knife."
"If I fail this exam, I might just die." *(figure of speech, no plan)*	"Next week, I'll make them pay for what they did—you'll see." *(with detailed plan or list of targets)*
"Ugh, I hate everyone here today." *(venting after a bad day, no specific target)*	Researching weapon laws and security camera locations on campus forums.
"I could throw my laptop out the window right now." *(expressing frustration at tech issues)*	Drawing detailed maps of a building with escape routes blocked off.
"Don't tempt me, I might just flip this table." *(said jokingly on a game night)*	Sending repeated threatening messages to a specific person along with photos of weapons.

Barks should warrant a brief check-in if context is unclear, but often require only support or clarification. Bite examples should immediately trigger a formal threat assessment and potential intervention. Your process should include flowcharts and diagrams that help those involved better understand the approach.



Transient vs. Substantive Threats

Dewey Cornell[2], a psychologist and school safety expert, developed a framework to help educators, law enforcement, and threat assessment teams distinguish between transient threats (often not serious) and substantive threats (potentially serious and requiring intervention).

Transient threats are not serious and often made in the heat of the moment, as a joke, or out of frustration, without intent to cause harm. These threats are often made in anger or jest, are quickly retracted when confronted, lack sustained intent or planning, and do not involve concrete steps taken toward action. An example would be a student who says, "I'm gonna fail this test and just blow up," then apologizes and explains it was a joke.

Substantive threats are intended to be carried out, with some evidence of planning, means, or genuine intent to harm. These threats involve a specific target, time, place, or method. Statements are repeated or reinforced over time. The threats may be accompanied by planning behaviors (such as weapons acquisition or location scouting). An example of this would be a student who says, "On Friday, I'll stab Jake in the common lounge on the library second floor," and is known or discovered to have a knife in his dorm room.

Herding the Cats

In writing this paper, we developed graphics and slides that utilize various "cats" as a metaphor for community members who exhibit an intense reaction to a threatening situation (often related to a more transient, "feeling threatened" behavior or comment from a student).

While not a comprehensive list outlining all the challenges faced by staff and faculty when they encounter a scenario that worries or concerns them, this does provide a starting point to address the unique concerns that arise from these different origins of worry.

1. **Limited Experience:** In this type of situation, the individual in question has limited experience interacting with the student or lacks familiarity with this seemingly threatening interaction. It's their lack of experience and confidence that creates a hole in their ability to respond to the crisis or challenge effectively.

Example: A first-year academic advisor encounters a student crying in their office about failing grades. The advisor, who has never dealt with an emotionally upset student before, feels paralyzed and simply tells the student to "make an appointment with counseling" without offering comfort or listening, or lacks the skill set to make a soft referral.

Solution: Have the advisor seek out basic training in de-escalation and student support. They will learn to use simple scripts such as: *"I can see this is really difficult for you. Let's slow down for a moment and talk through next steps."* Encourage the staff to lean on experienced colleagues for mentorship or shadowing opportunities.

[2] Cornell, D. G., & Sheras, P. L. (2006). Guidelines for responding to student threats of violence (2nd ed.). Sopris West.

2. **Fearful to Demands:** When the upset person makes assertive and emotionally laden demands on the staff or faculty, this becomes upsetting to the receiver. The faculty or staff member is often worried or unsure how to handle the matter. Behaviors that present on the tipping point between assertive and aggressive are categorized as aggressive in the mind of the staff or faculty member. This jump to judgment that the behavior is aggressive impacts their ability to effectively intervene and respond calmly and with focus.

   Example: A student angrily demands immediate grade changes, pounding the desk for emphasis. The faculty member perceives this as aggressive and becomes defensive, raising their voice in return. They may immediately jump to calling University Police or the conduct office.

   Solution: The faculty should be helped to learn to differentiate assertiveness from aggression and avoid escalating tone. Teaching boundary-setting phrases can be helpful: *"I want to hear your concern, but it is difficult to understand fully. If you can take a second to compose yourself, I am here to listen."* They should practice calming strategies (controlled breathing, grounding techniques) before responding.

3. **Sensitivity to Profanity:** Some staff and faculty, either through their upbringing, experiences, or personal morals, become upset at language that is overly casual or includes what the faculty or staff member may consider profanity. This type of language can render the faculty or staff member unable to consider the cultural and personal experiences and current emotional state of the person who is upset. The differing expectations for communication make it more challenging for staff or faculty members to engage with a non-adversarial approach.

   Example: A staff member in housing is taken aback when a resident shouts, "This whole system is f***ed!" The staff member fixates on the profanity instead of hearing the frustration about the issues that may have caused the student to become emotional.

   Solution: Staff should be encouraged to reframe profanity as an expression of emotional intensity, rather than a personal attack. They should be trained to avoid correcting language in the moment and instead focus on the message beneath the words. After resolution, if needed, provide guidance on constructive communication and provide support to the staff member in decompressing from language that is difficult for them to receive.

4. **Group Pressure:** A staff or faculty member may have become knowledgeable of a larger pattern of behavior or concerns that have occurred in the past with a student and their colleagues. This knowledge can inadvertently set the tone and direction for how they respond to or report that student's behavior. In this case, the staff or faculty may be responding as part of a group, department, or in an attempt to support another colleague who has been mistreated or struggled with an interaction in the past.

Example: A department has had repeated problems with one student perceived as "difficult." When the student asks a new faculty member for an extension, the faculty member reflexively denies it, influenced by colleagues' stories rather than the individual request.

Solution: Faculty must receive training to evaluate each situation individually, warning them of the natural tendency to participate in automatic group bias. While acknowledging departmental history, they should use neutral and supportive language with the student. Faculty members should be encouraged to engage in team discussions on shared values related to fairness and compassion.

5. **Already Overwhelmed:** Stress and our reactions to stress are cumulative in nature. If a faculty or staff member is already struggling or overwhelmed with personal or professional worries, concerns about the larger world or politics, or is upset about personal health or issues in their family, it is reasonably possible they will not be in a positive mindset to respond to a demanding or upset member of the campus community.

Example: A staff member juggling family illness and workload is approached by a distraught student. Already exhausted, the staff member curtly says, "This isn't my problem," unintentionally worsening the student's distress.

Solution: Staff should be trained to recognize early signs of compassion fatigue or burnout. They should also learn to use brief, supportive referrals if their capacity is low: *"I hear you're struggling. Let's connect you with someone who can help more directly."* Supervisors should encourage employees to take wellness breaks and provide access to employee assistance programs.

6. **Alone & Unsupported:** A staff or faculty member who feels unsupported, left alone, and without the resources needed will have difficulty responding adequately to the situation at hand. The absence of support can be actual or perceived. It may be tied to staffing levels, recent firings or budget cuts, system changes, or other factors that leave the employee generally frustrated and unprepared to respond in a heightened and potentially crisis situation.

Example: An adjunct is teaching at night when a student has a panic attack. With no immediate supervisor present, no clear protocol, and no training on after-hours resources for support, the faculty member freezes and feels abandoned.

Solution: Faculty should advocate for and be provided with clear crisis protocols and easily accessible support numbers. Efforts should be made to build a peer network or buddy system for after-hours coverage. Supervisors should ensure orientation training includes crisis response and reporting pathways.

7. **Focus on Job:** Some staff and faculty, particularly adjunct faculty and temporary staff, are focused on what is required of them in the job and are hesitant to give anything else that is not required. They approach potential crises with the attitude of "this isn't what I was hired for" and are unwilling to "go the extra mile" to explore other, more effective ways to calm the person(s) in front of them from escalating.

Example: A part-time lab assistant sees a student crying in the hallway but thinks, "That's not my responsibility," and walks away.

Solution: Onboarding for a position in a collegiate environment should include the expectation that community well-being is part of every role, even if not formally stated in the job description. If this expectation has been neglected in campus culture for a long time, leadership needs to model and lead it from the top. Preparing faculty and staff to meet this cultural expectation would involve providing them with low-effort response tools (e.g., knowing the right phone number or office to call). Supervisors should reinforce the shared duty of care as a value of the institution, not an added burden.

8. **Past Trauma:** Our own experience with trauma and negative experiences often sets the stage for managing future traumatic or upsetting experiences, including those we observe in others. For some faculty and staff, this could result in a dramatic overreaction to a concern being presented or a more intense fight, flight, or freeze response beyond what the current situation warrants.

Example: A staff member with a history of domestic violence encounters a student who slams a door and yells. The noise and aggression trigger a strong panic response; the staff member flees the room, leaving the student unsupported.

Solution: Encourage self-awareness of triggers and possible reactions. Provide access to professional counseling or trauma-informed training. Allow for flexibility in staffing so employees with trauma histories can step out if triggered, while others step in.

How to Address Threats

When addressing any threats, it's important to start with the context to better understand exactly what was said and done. We should avoid making assumptions and instead focus on developing a hypothesis and determining what evidence supports or refutes it. While doing so, we must take a step back to reflect on our own innate biases, ensuring that cultural, religious, and political differences are not misinterpreted.

It is essential to take the time to gather contextual information using a hypothesis-based approach where evidence is used to strengthen arguments and build consensus. There is a tendency to rush people into concluding incidents quickly and move into the action phase. Moving forward with a clear understanding of whether the threat in question is more transient or substantive in nature enables us to apply proportional interventions more effectively. For ***transient threats***, this means utilizing mediation techniques, restorative communication, and counseling support to explore the origins of the threat and develop more effective methods for expressing feelings and

emotions when upset. For ***substantive threats***, there will be more protective action, potential conduct intervention, law enforcement involvement, and safety planning.

Whether transient or substantive, ongoing monitoring and reassessment are critical. Even transient threats can escalate if underlying issues remain unaddressed. Having a clear policy outlining how your college or university will address threats is also strongly recommended. A sample policy is outlined in Appendix A.

Hypothesis	Assumptions
Multiple ideas and theories to start	Typically, one idea that shuts out all others
Based on facts and data	Based on subjective information and opinion
Built on evidence and supported by data and facts	Lack evidence and support
Many ideas developed by a larger group	Arrived at quickly by a single person
Builds upon new data and grows and adapts to the situation at hand	Stays static and is resistant to shifting when new data or facts are uncovered
Encourage a growth mindset, exploration, and debate	Close off other possibilities

Appendix A: Sample Policy Language

Purpose: To maintain a safe campus environment by identifying and addressing credible threats, while upholding students' constitutional rights to free speech and expression.

Scope: This policy applies to all students, faculty, staff, and visitors on campus or participating in college-sponsored events.

Definitions

- **Threat:** A statement or behavior indicating an intent to cause physical harm or violence to oneself or others.
- **Transient Threat:** A statement made impulsively or without serious intent, often retracted or explained as a joke or expression of frustration.
- **Substantive Threat:** A threat accompanied by evidence of intent, planning, or capability to carry out the threat.
- **Protected Speech:** Expression that is constitutionally protected, including speech that may be offensive or controversial but does not constitute a true threat.

Policy

1. **Distinguishing Threats from Free Speech**: The College recognizes the right to free speech and expression, including speech that may be unpopular or provocative. However, speech that constitutes a true threat (a serious expression of intent to harm) will be addressed in accordance with this policy.
2. **Threat Assessment Process**: The College's Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) will evaluate all reported threats using an evidence-based, multidisciplinary approach. Factors considered include the context, the individual's history, the specificity of the threat, and any corroborating behaviors or plans.
3. **Response to Transient Threats**: Transient threats will generally be addressed through supportive measures such as counseling, mediation, or educational interventions, without punitive disciplinary action, unless behavior escalates.
4. **Response to Substantive Threats**: Substantive threats will prompt immediate intervention, which may include safety planning, disciplinary action, and involvement of law enforcement if warranted.
5. **Due Process and Transparency**: Individuals accused of making threats will be afforded due process rights, including notification of allegations, opportunity to respond, and clear explanation of outcomes. The College commits to the transparent application of this policy.
6. **Education and Prevention**: The College will provide ongoing education to the campus community on the difference between protected speech and threats, how to report concerns, and resources for support.
7. **Non-Retaliation:** Retaliation against any individual who reports a threat or participates in a threat assessment is prohibited.

Appendix B: Practical Guidance

Faculty and staff encounter moments that feel unsafe or intimidating, even when the behavior does not rise to the level of a criminal act or student conduct violation. These experiences, while subjective, are very real and can leave employees feeling shaken, fearful, or unsupported. These practical strategies, policy considerations, and support mechanisms are designed to help staff respond more effectively while maintaining a safe and respectful campus environment.

1. **Validating Staff and Faculty Concerns:** It's important to acknowledge that fear and discomfort are natural human responses. Staff and faculty should be reassured that their concerns are taken seriously, even when an incident does not constitute a substantive threat. The institution should encourage reporting of these concerns, not only for documentation purposes but also to ensure that staff do not feel isolated in their experiences. It may be beneficial to spend extended time with some faculty and staff, explaining why you have determined that a threat is transient and why the research, policy, or law supports your categorization.

2. **Decision Frameworks and Quick-Check Questions:** To avoid overreaction or underreaction, staff can use simple reflection tools when an interaction feels threatening:
   - Is there a plan? (Is the individual identifying a time, place, or method?)
   - Is there a target? (Is someone specifically named or identified?)
   - Is there capacity? (Does the person have access to means of harm?)
   - Is this venting or escalation? (Does the statement resemble a "bark" or a "bite"?)

   When answers are unclear, staff should consult with supervisors, BIT/CARE teams, or peers before making assumptions.

3. **De-Escalation and Communication Skills:** Faculty and staff benefit from training in practical, low-barrier skills that can calm tense situations. Useful techniques include:
   - Scripts for setting boundaries: "I want to hear your concern, but it is difficult to understand when you are yelling. If you can take a second to compose yourself, I am here to listen."
   - Body language awareness: Remaining seated, using open hand gestures, and maintaining a calm tone.
   - Reframing language: Recognizing profanity or intensity as emotional expression rather than personal attack.
   - Role-playing these scenarios in training helps normalize confident, measured responses.

4. **Support for Faculty and Staff Well-Being:** Many faculty and staff members may have personal histories or current stressors that amplify their sense of threat. Institutions should:
   - Provide access to employee assistance programs and counseling.
   - Offer trauma-informed training to increase awareness of personal triggers.
   - Encourage peer support systems (e.g., buddy systems, after-hours coverage).
   - Promote wellness breaks and supervisor check-ins after difficult incidents.

5. **Policy Language on Subjective Fear:** Campus policies should explicitly address staff and faculty experiences of "feeling threatened." While not every report will result in disciplinary or legal action, policies should:
    - Clarify that reporting is always encouraged, even for subjective concerns.
    - Commit to reviewing reports with respect and proportionality.
    - Outline available faculty and staff supports (e.g., mentorship, debriefing sessions, supervisor guidance).
6. **Shared Responsibility Culture:** Safety on campus is a collective responsibility. Even adjunct faculty, part-time staff, and temporary employees play a role in responding to concerning behavior. Institutions should:
    - Reinforce the shared duty of care as part of organizational values.
    - Provide low-effort tools (quick referral contacts, online reporting forms).
    - Emphasize that faculty and staff are not expected to resolve crises alone, but are key partners in connecting students to resources.

Situation	Staff Response
A student loudly complains, "This whole system is f***ed!"	Acknowledge intensity without correcting language. "I can see you're really frustrated. Let's talk through what's going on."
A staff member is already exhausted, and a student breaks down in their office.	Use a supportive referral. "I hear you're struggling. Let's connect you with someone who can help right now."
A faculty member recalls a past traumatic experience when a student slams a door.	Step out briefly if needed, then notify a supervisor for coverage and debriefing support.

By equipping faculty and staff with validation tools, reflection strategies, communication techniques, and institutional support, colleges can bridge the gap between subjective feelings of threat and objective threat assessment. These measures strengthen both individual resilience and the overall culture of safety, ensuring that faculty and staff feel secure, respected, and empowered even when the behavior they encounter does not rise to the level of a criminal or conduct violation.