

Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Institute

Before the Interview: Get Context

- ❖ **Incident report.** Perhaps the most important piece of information is the first-hand accounts of what happened and what has been documented. This allows the person conducting the assessment to question the student about his or her version of events, test for authenticity and deception, and further explore contextually clues to the student's behavior. In the education community, these often are incident reports. In the community or workplace, these may be police reports or supervisor evaluations or written warnings.
- ❖ **Schedule, grade point average, and transcript.** These provide a glimpse into the student's past academic behavior; clues to periods of time that may have been more difficult for the student with regard to grades; and information about the student's current professors, class locations, and frequency. In a workplace setting, these data may be kept through human resources in the employee file. Performance appraisals, harassment complaints, or similar documentation could provide essential information for the person conducting the assessment.
- ❖ **Residential life history.** For students living on campus, this kind of information can provide some insight into social interactions; how a student reacts when confronted with rule violations; and information regarding hygiene, sleep habits, and potentially addictive behaviors.
- ❖ **Conduct and criminal and judicial history.** This provides some insight into the individual's past behavior on campus as it relates to following the code of conduct and the rules of the institution. Information may shed light on parent involvement, substance abuse or dependence issues, and anger control and aggression. For those in workplace or community settings, past involvement with law enforcement could provide important insight into impulse control, authority conflicts, and illegal activities.
- ❖ **Previous treatment.** This would include past outpatient therapy contact, access to inpatient psychiatric records, psychological testing results, and medication history.
- ❖ **Parent contact.** For younger individuals, having the ability to talk with the parents and involve them early on in the process of assessment is helpful for a number of reasons: It provides a larger context for the student's behavior, and it also provides an additional layer of risk management (rather than calling them for the first time after the student has engaged again in violent or threatening behaviors).
- ❖ **Admissions/hire materials.** Many schools require students to write an essay in order to obtain admission to the college or university. These narrative essays may provide some indication of motivation, insight into past behavior, or hopes for the future. An essay could help the person doing the evaluation have a better context for understanding the student's frustration if they are unable to achieve dreams or goals. For those in workplace or community settings, reviewing initial employment documents such as the cover letter, resume, and response to employment questions could provide insight into past contextual information.
- ❖ **Social media profile.** Many individuals have a vibrant social media profile that can potentially be accessed through the Internet. Some suggested searches would include www.google.com, www.myspace.com, www.facebook.com, www.youtube.com, Craig's list for the city and state, and www.twitter.com. In yet another rampage shooting, Elliot Rodger demonstrates the importance of attending to social media. Rodger also created a 141-page manifesto and carefully crafted and disseminated his message prior to the attack. The social media footprint provided opportunities to identify risk and engage in intervention.