

## ConsultLine Policy

### Title: Procedures for the Termination of a Call

Being committed to serving the Commonwealth of PA with the highest standard of professionalism, and with the awareness that our actions may be construed as a reflection on the Bureau of Special Education and the Office for Dispute Resolution, the following policy has been thoughtfully developed and is provided as guidance for use by the ConsultLine Specialists.

### Background

At the root of this policy is the understanding that callers to the ConsultLine have questions and concerns for which they are seeking information which may impact the education of a child with a disability. With a commitment to serving the constituency in a fair and timely manner, the following policy has been developed to provide guidance to staff so that they may effectively manage their time during calls as well as gauge the value of continuing a productive call which exceeds one hour. This policy also aims to identify some acceptable methods for the discontinuation of an unproductive or unmanageable call.

ConsultLine is staffed with three full time Specialists and one Supervisor/Specialist. In that the ConsultLine serves approximately 3,500 to 4,000 callers per year, with sometimes complex information, it is understood that the length of a ConsultLine call may last for anywhere between 15 minutes to an hour or more. During this timeframe, there are other callers who are waiting for a timely reply. In the interest of providing equitable service to all, at times it may be appropriate and necessary to curtail a call which is either deemed by the ConsultLine Specialist or Supervisor as no longer productive, or for which the tone of the caller is uncommonly adversarial, belligerent or rude.

The following examples are suggestions. Actions will be dictated by the Specialists' professional judgment or at Supervisor's direction.

For conversations:

- that have deteriorated;
- staff feels he or she is being verbally attacked;
- language has become seriously offensive and staff has already asked the caller once to refrain from such language; and/or
- when staff have already addressed the callers main issues and his or her perception is that the caller is trying to unnecessarily prolong the conversation;

It is permissible and advisable that staff convey to the caller that by their estimation, this is no longer a productive call. The following method may be used as appropriate:

- "I believe that I've provided as much assistance as I am able. I'm going to end our conversation now". At this point you may gently hang up the phone or seek an agreement from the caller that he/she will try to speak with you using a better tone (depending on what has already transpired and how much more time you anticipate the call may last).
- You may also suggest that perhaps now is not a good time to have the conversation and agree to contact the caller at a later date.

At no time should staff use unkind terminology toward the caller; however, it is permissible to say "I feel threatened by your tone" or "I believe you may be making incorrect conclusions about me" or "Let me clarify my role". (This is effective when callers try to solicit opinion or press for a judgment regarding a particular issue.)

ConsultLine staff are to conduct themselves in a balanced and professional manner at all times during their communication with the constituency. Information shared with the caller should be provided in clear and common language to the extent practicable and from a neutral perspective. Staff assist callers with understanding the meaning of regulatory language but do not attempt to interpret or advise callers with regard to its content.

SMD 4/09