

Suggested actions or actions we need to respond to

**Suicide threats, escalating calls to manager, accusations and allegations,
threats**

Managing behaviour

Consistent Boundaries

Reasonable adjustments

Responding to suicide threats

Let me just check what I've heard: did you say that you are thinking about taking your own life?

I can't imagine how you are feeling just now and I can hear that you are very distressed.

We have a good partnership with the Samaritans, they are an organisation who are particularly skilled in offering support for people who are experiencing difficult / stressful times. I'd like to offer you their telephone number.

TELEPHONE: 116123

NOTE: we can also call the Samaritans, with the caller's consent and give them a name and telephone number to call back.

Escalating calls to team manager - CUSTOMER SERVICE PROVISION

(1) If the request to escalate is about the CUSTOMER SERVICE provided

Staff Member: *Can I ask whether you want me to transfer you to my manager because of the advice I've provided or because of the service that I've provided?*

Complainant: *Because of the service.*

Staff Member: *I'm sorry to hear that. What was it about the service I provided that you were unhappy with?*

Complainant: *This, this and this.*

Staff Member: *Well, I can certainly ask my manager, [NAME], to call you back to discuss your concerns. What number is best for them to call on?*

Complainant: *I want you to put me through to them now.*

Staff Member: *I'm afraid that's not possible right now. What I can do is ask them to call you back at a time that is convenient to you. When might that be?*

Escalating calls to team manager- ADVICE GIVEN

(2) If the request to escalate is about the ADVICE provided

Staff Member: *Can I ask whether you want me to transfer you to my manager because of the advice I've provided or because of the service that I've provided?*

Complainant: The advice.

Staff Member: I'd like to reassure you that the advice I've given is the same advice that you'd get from anyone in my team. What part of my advice were you specifically unhappy about?

Complainant: This, this and this.

Staff : I'm sorry that this wasn't what you wanted to hear. I'd like to reassure you that it's the correct advice. My manager will give you the same advice. They'll recommend that you do this, this and this, just as I did. Does that make sense?

[If complainant still wishes to speak to manager]

Complainant: Yes, but I still want to speak to the manager.

Staff Member: *Well, I can certainly ask my manager, [NAME], to call you back to discuss your concerns. What number is best for them to call on?*

Complainant: *I want you to put me through to them now.*

Staff Member: *If manager is not around - I'm afraid that's not possible right now. What I can do is ask them to call you back soon at a time that is convenient to you. When might that be?*

TALKING TO BEREAVED PEOPLE

a few simple words might make all the difference

TIPS

seek permission : acknowledge pain and hurt : talk about self-care

SEEK PERMISSION

May I ask your permission to ask some questions about [your late husband, wife, friend, etc] – Mr Smith, Ms Smith.
I know that speaking about this may be difficult for you.

ACKNOWLEDGING PAIN & HURT

I don't know what your pain is but I am hearing that it is really difficult from ...

- what you have told me
- our conversation today

Thank you very much for taking the time to have this conversation with me.

SELF CARE

- I hope you can now go and get yourself a cup of tea and take some time to gather your thoughts, I appreciate this has been difficult for you. Grief is a difficult process.
- I hope that you have a family member or friend who you can speak to, to support you in what you are going through. Grief is a difficult process.

You may find it helpful to speak with **CRUSE Bereavement Care** in Scotland. Many people who contact us find it useful to contact outside organisations like Cruse, who are separate from ourselves and can offer support to peoples unique bereavement experience.

You can speak to them free and confidentially on **0845-600-22-27**

OR

Compassionate Friends (support for bereaved parents and their families)

0845-123-2304

Approach to managing behaviour

Be aware of your own reactions

Stay calm and try not to mirror behaviour. Take deep breaths and focus on what you need the conversation to achieve

Acknowledge emotions/difficulties

Reflect the emotion – show you are listening.

Refocus the conversation

Move the conversation – what can you do, what needs to be done next

Apply boundaries

Do so calmly and consistently

Dealing with Anger

Acknowledge

I can hear this situation is making you very angry.

I understand why that would be upsetting. / I agree that would be frustrating.

I understand your position and why you feel strongly about this

Refocus

Let's look at what we can do today.

We can help by..

Boundaries

We may need to take a break because this conversation is becoming difficult

We can't solve the problem/take this forward while this discussion is distressing you so much.

This conversation is becoming unhelpful. If the shouting doesn't stop, I'm going to have to end this call.

I will end this call as it is not possible to continue, I have explained I would need to do so if the shouting doesn't stop and it is continuing. I am now ending the call, goodbye.

Dealing with Passive – Aggression/Condescension

Acknowledge

I appreciate that you are frustrated with this situation

I appreciate your disappointment with the advice I've given you today/ decision we've made

Refocus

In conversations with complainants we recognise that people can be upset/frustrated and we are committed to communicating positively with everyone

It's important that we treat people with respect and dignity and also important we have the same right, [particularly working in our home environment as we are just now.]

Introduce boundaries

Can we please try to continue this conversation in a more positive/respectful/polite manner.

GOING ROUND IN CIRCLES

Acknowledge

We are now going round in circles.

The conversation isn't productive/ we aren't making any progress

We are covering the same ground

Refocus

Let me clarify. / Let me summarise. / Let me recap.

I would like to ask you some questions.

Let's focus on how we can take this forward.

Boundary setting.

We are now repeating ourselves again and that's not taking this forward. I will now. I need to now go and ... note what we've agreed / send you information / make enquiries etc.

It would be really helpful if you could put this in writing for us, we don't need all the detail and you may find summarising or using numbers and bullet points help you to highlight the key points you want us to consider.

WON'T STOP TALKING

TIP - Going silent will often prompt the other person to go silent too, however, when doing so you must be ready with a statement which takes the conversation forward.

I'd like to summarise what we have agreed. [proceed to summarise]

I need to ask you some questions. [Ask the first question]

I need to let you know what I'm going to do next. [Don't pause, explain]

I need to take time to consider the information you have given me and I will get back to you.

TOO MUCH IRRELEVANT INFORMATION

Note: Please be aware some people may struggle to co-ordinate their information and may be concerned they haven't explained themselves. It can be helpful to take a lead by asking questions and explaining what information you need and why. Reassure people that you will take a note/that they can come back to us if they have forgotten something. It may also be helpful to signpost someone to advocacy who can help them focus.

Let's focus on some of the key points. I would like to ask you some quick questions that you can answer yes or no to help us concentrate on those.

I would like to help us move forward by concentrating on areas where we can help. I know this is part of a bigger picture and I will make sure I ask questions that help us get all the information we need.

THREATS

Threats made against SPSO:

What you've just said sounded like a serious threat. When serious threats are made to this office, I need to take action and notify a senior manager and possibly the police.

Threats made against an organisation:

What you've just said sounded like a serious threat. When serious threats are made to this office, whether aimed at us or other organisations, I need to take action and notify a senior manager and possibly the police

ACCUSATIONS AND ALLEGATIONS

discrimination

'if I was xxx I would get it'

My role is to assess *your* application and circumstances. I can't comment on other cases.

The language you have used is offensive and I would ask you not to repeat this. We are committed to being fair to all applicants and are totally opposed to discrimination. As such, we carry out our work in a way that is fair to all sections of the community and this will apply to my handling of your case.

ACCUSATIONS AND ALLEGATIONS – general

General allegations against the service should be acknowledged but people can be understandably frustrated and it is usually unproductive to challenge a general broad allegation.

Acknowledge:

I appreciate why people feel frustrated and angry with us when we make these decisions.

I can hear your frustration and anger.

It is usually sensible to bring the conversation to an end or move it on at this point but you can also probe the allegation if it feels appropriate:

If you have specific concerns, or evidence please let me know.

We have customer service standards and it's important we live up to them. Do you have specific concerns?

Setting boundaries

Focusing your anger and frustration on me personally, isn't helping.

Without evidence, we consider such statements to be abusive and that means this conversation will need to end if we continue down this route.

Contacting lots of different colleagues

I know that you have also spoken to X/Y/Z about this matter recently. My colleagues and I have all given you the same advice and that advice still stands.

Can we agree that if you have any further questions that you contact me directly as I am dealing with this matter.

Consistent Boundaries

REMEMBER: You can end any call if you are become distressed or upset for any reason.

Sometimes you will need to end a call because it crosses the boundary in our engagement policy. For some actions we have zero tolerance these include:

Abuse,

Violence,

Harrassment.

We may also end calls because of a **refusal to co-operate** or not engage in **repeat calls which impact on our ability to provide a service**. **We do not need to comply with demands that are not reasonable.**

Establishing and applying a boundary - 1

Describe the situation neutrally (use we and I rather than you)

This conversation has become difficult/unhelpful.

We are not communicating well.

We have talked a lot today.

That language is not appropriate.

That language is abusive

If it is a zero tolerance situation

I am ending the call.

Establishing and applying a boundary - 2

If it is an active management suggest a change/explain what you are doing and why .

I am doing all I can to help you and I have explained xyz... [explain what isn't helpful – avoid linking with but/however]...

Could you be mindful that you are swearing, I know it isn't directed at me but...

We can take a break and let things calm down. Shall I call you back in xxx.

The time we are spending isn't taking this forward and I have other commitments – I will end this call and do (anything agreed) but we wont be able to talk further today.

I know you are disappointed with the decision/position - swearing isn't going to change it.

Transferred call

Your call has been passed to me by _____ because they felt the conversation was becoming difficult. Can you tell me why you think things had gone wrong?

We know people can be angry and frustrated when they contact us and when we can't help straight away that can make people feel worse. We need to ensure that doesn't lead to conversations which involve abuse and we ask staff to end contact if that happens. It's not good for anyone if conversations become abusive or distressing.

Proactively questioning whether a reasonable adjustment is required

You mentioned that you *have a health condition, disability, are autistic etc.* Can I please check with you if there are adjustments that we should consider in communicating with you?

We are committed to delivering a service which is accessible to all

Assistance in making complaints

Where requests are made for SPSO to make an adjustment to our service by writing a complaint on behalf of a complainant, the following response is suggested:

'Can I ask if you would mind disclosing the nature of your disability to allow me to make an adjustment suggestion for you, to allow you to submit your complaint to our office'

'We would recommend that you contact your local CAB who can assist you in making a complaint to our office, they can help you by writing on your behalf and can act as a contact with our office if that would be helpful to you? We have a good working relationship with CABs and I can find your nearest Bureau for you'. Most people find their assistance helpful in supporting them to make a complaint.

'If you are not keen to use the services of the CAB, would you consider using an Advocacy service? The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance will be able to let you know about what advocacy services are available to you, they will not be able to provide advocacy themselves directly but you can chat to them about what is available in your area and how advocacy works'.