

COMPANIONS

MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS



Managing Challenging Behaviours During Visitations

Visiting companions who are facing hardship can sometimes involve challenging behaviours driven by frustration, disappointment, or emotional distress. These behaviours may include raised voices, aggression, or erratic responses, and can place members at risk if not managed carefully. The safety and well-being of our members is paramount.

This guide outlines practical steps for recognising and responding to challenging behaviours while prioritising personal safety at all times.

Ensuring Member Safety During Visitations

Prepare Before the Visit

- **Plan Ahead:** Know the purpose of the visit, anticipate any concerns, and think through how you will respond if the situation becomes uncomfortable or unsafe.
- **Review Companion Information:** If available, check for any past notes indicating potential challenges, substance use or sensitivities.
- **Pre-Visit Contact:** A brief phone call before attending may help gauge the companion's emotional state and prepare you for the interaction. If you feel the visit could place you at risk, speak to your president. They might recommend adjusting who attends the visit, changing the location (e.g. meeting outside or in a public space), or postponing or cancelling the visit.
- **Establish a Signal/Safe Word:** Agree in advance on a discreet signal or phrase to indicate if one member feels unsafe or wishes to end the interview early.
- **Let Others Know:** Ensure a third person (e.g. another member or staff on-site) knows a meeting is taking place and checks in if needed.
- **Pray Before the Visit:** Take a moment for prayer or reflection before entering the companion's space to centre yourself and ask for guidance and protection.

Prioritise Entry and Exit Safety

- **Car Positioning:** Park in a spot that allows for a quick and unblocked departure. Reverse into the space where possible and avoid tight or confined parking areas.
- **Exit Strategy:** Identify a clear, easily accessible exit route from the home or meeting location as soon as you arrive. Remain seated or positioned in a way that allows you to leave without obstruction.



Managing Dogs and Other Animals

- **Safety Around Dogs:** Many companions own dogs—sometimes large or aggressive. You are within your rights to request that dogs be secured in another area before beginning the conversation.
- **Use of Barriers:** Carry a sturdy object such as a clipboard, notebook, or water bottle that can be used as a gentle barrier in case of unwanted dog attention. Never attempt to interact with or restrain a dog yourself.
- **Assess the Risk:** If you feel unsafe around a dog, do not proceed with the visit. Politely explain that you will need to reschedule once the animal is secure.

Remain Calm and Respectful

- **Keep Your Distance:** Begin the conversation at a respectful distance to avoid causing discomfort or escalation. Adjust your position only if it feels safe to do so.
- **Stay Non-Judgmental:** Approach the situation with empathy and without assumptions. Avoid arguments or defensiveness, even if tensions rise.
- **Use Active Listening:** Let the companion speak and validate their concerns without taking responsibility for things beyond your control. Refer to Learning Bite 3 for more information on active listening.

De-Escalation Techniques to Support Safety

- **Stay Calm and Composed:** Your calm behaviour can help de-escalate the situation. Avoid reacting emotionally.
- **Speak Clearly and Respectfully:** Use simple, non-threatening language. Avoid jargon or anything that may be misinterpreted.
- **Validate Emotions:** Let the companion know you understand their feelings: “It sounds like this has been really difficult for you.”
- **Offer Choices:** Giving small options—like when or where to talk—can help reduce agitation by restoring a sense of control.
- **Avoid Confrontation:** If the conversation becomes too intense or unsafe, don’t push forward. End the visit politely and leave.

Know When to Leave and Seek Support

- **End the Visit if Unsafe:** If at any time you feel threatened or uncomfortable, leave immediately. You are not required to stay in any situation that compromises your safety.
- **Record the Incident:** Create a Client Event in CDS and document any incidents of concern, including the presence of aggressive behaviour or unsafe animals.
- **Seek Support:** Reach out to your Regional Support Officer or Conference Support for guidance, debriefing, or follow-up arrangements.
- **Continue Learning:** Attend training in de-escalation and personal safety to build confidence and awareness for future visits.

Activity

Clare is a long-term Companion of your Conference, though no contact has been made for nearly five months. She recently contacted the Helpline requesting food assistance. Upon arriving at her home, you quickly notice Clare appears unwell and that her needs may go far beyond food.

You provide her with a box of groceries, but she becomes visibly upset. She yells that this is food she cannot eat and insists she requested a voucher for fresh and gluten-free items. Clare then bursts into tears, saying that no one cares and questioning the value of Vinnies support.

As a group, discuss how you would respond to Clare's situation, ensuring both compassionate support and member safety..