

COMPANIONS

MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS



Managing Challenging Behaviours During Visitations

Meeting with companions who are facing hardship can sometimes involve challenging behaviours driven by frustration, disappointment, emotional distress, or the influence of substances. These behaviours may include raised voices, aggression, swearing, erratic responses, or signs of intoxication, 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 Interviews

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.
- **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.

Set Up the Interview Space Thoughtfully

- **Room Layout:** Sit with a clear path to the exit and avoid seating arrangements that could restrict movement.
- **Open, Non-Confrontational Setup:** Position chairs to allow space and reduce tension—avoid sitting directly opposite the companion unless necessary.
- **Maintain Visibility:** Where possible, keep the meeting area visible to others or within reach of assistance.

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.
- **If the Companion Appears Intoxicated or Under the Influence:** Avoid entering the home. Politely explain that it would be best to return at another time and remove yourself from the situation. Substance use can impair judgment and increase risk. Report the incident to your Conference President or Regional Support Officer for follow-up.
- **If the Companion Expresses Thoughts of Self-Harm:** Remain calm and do not make promises you cannot keep. Express concern and listen non-judgmentally. Let the companion know you care and encourage them to seek help. If there is an immediate risk, call emergency services (000). Notify your President and your Regional Support Officer. Document the incident appropriately in CDS and complete an Incident Report

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.



TRY THIS

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..

