

COMPANIONS

SENSITIVE ISSUES



Understanding Sensitive Issues:

Sensitive issues can include the companion's odour, language, or repetitive smoking. Companions may struggle with personal hygiene, impulse control, or use language that might seem inappropriate. These challenges can be part of their situation, often influenced by factors such as mental health issues, financial hardship, or lack of access to resources.

Action: If you feel that you are not the best person to handle the companion's needs due to these sensitive issues, you have the right to pause or discontinue the meeting. It's essential to approach this decision with compassion and ensure that the companion is referred to someone better suited to provide the necessary support.

Unhygienic Conditions and Hoarding

Some companions may be living in unhygienic conditions, including strong odours, clutter, or signs of hoarding. These situations can be confronting and may indicate deeper issues, such as trauma, mental illness, or lack of access to cleaning resources.

Action:

Remain non-judgmental and prioritise your own safety. If the environment feels unsafe or distressing (e.g. overpowering odours, animal waste, or severe clutter), you are not required to enter. Politely explain the need to reschedule in a more suitable setting or refer the visit to someone better equipped. Document your concerns and discuss next steps with your Conference President or Regional Support Officer.

Requesting No Smoking During Meetings:

You have the right to request that companions refrain from smoking during a meeting. Smoking can be a distraction and may create an uncomfortable environment for you and others present.

Action: Politely ask the companion to refrain from smoking, explaining that it helps create a better environment for the discussion. Offer to reschedule the meeting or find an alternative setting if necessary.

Maintaining Respect and Sincerity:

Always be respectful and sincere in your interactions. Avoid using an artificial cadence or a patronizing, overly sympathetic tone. Authenticity helps build trust and rapport.

Action: Communicate naturally, showing genuine interest and empathy. Pay attention to your tone of voice and body language to ensure they convey respect and sincerity.



Supporting Individuals Experiencing Domestic Violence

Domestic and family violence is a serious and complex issue. It's critical to approach these conversations with care, avoid judgment, and never assume that a companion feels safe.

If you observe signs of injury or the companion seems fearful or withdrawn, you may gently ask:

- “Are you feeling safe at home?”
- “Is there anyone hurting you or making you feel afraid?”
- “Do you have someone you trust that you can talk to about this?”

If the person discloses abuse or you have concerns:

- Ask if they have contacted the police or if they are linked to a Domestic and Family Violence Support Service (e.g. DVCS).
- Avoid making promises you can't keep or telling them what to do.
- If the alleged perpetrator is present, do not ask sensitive questions. Instead, arrange to follow up privately or refer to a trained professional.
- Prioritise safety: If there is an immediate risk, call 000.

Action: Encourage the companion to connect with support services. With consent, provide referrals or printed information. Always inform your Conference President and Regional Support Officer and document the interaction appropriately.

Key Contacts in the ACT:

- Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS): 02 6280 0900 (24/7)
- Canberra Rape Crisis Centre: 02 6247 2525
- Police (non-emergency): 131 444
- Emergency: 000
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Managing Emotional Reactions:

Interacting with companions who have challenging behaviours or situations can evoke strong emotional reactions. It's important to manage your emotions and remain calm and composed.

Action: Practise self-awareness and self-regulation techniques, such as deep breathing or mindfulness, to maintain your composure during difficult interactions.

Establishing Boundaries:

Setting clear boundaries is essential to ensure both your well-being and that of the companion. Boundaries help maintain a professional and supportive relationship.

Action: Communicate your boundaries clearly and respectfully. For example, if a companion's behaviour becomes too challenging, explain your limits and suggest alternative solutions.

Be prepared to support individuals over time, where appropriate.

Sometimes, real change takes more than one visit. While not every situation will call for follow-up, being open to reconnecting—when needed and within your Conference's capacity—can make a difference. What may not work the first time might succeed later.

Action: Discuss with your Conference how to approach follow-up support in a way that balances compassion with capacity. Agree on when and how it may be appropriate to reconnect with individuals, and document any agreed next steps clearly in your visit notes.



Promoting Self-Care:

Encourage companions to practise self-care and seek appropriate resources to address their challenges. Self-care is crucial for their overall well-being.

Action: Share information about self-care practices and resources, such as local support groups, counselling services, and health clinics. Help them create a self-care plan tailored to their needs.

By considering these guidelines and taking appropriate actions, you can effectively manage sensitive issues during visits, ensuring that companions receive the support and respect they deserve.

Practising Cultural Sensitivity:

Cultural sensitivity involves being aware of and respecting cultural differences. Conference members may not always be familiar with the diverse protocols and customs of Aboriginal or culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Action: Rather than asking members to educate themselves, we acknowledge the need for structured, accessible training and resources. Until that is available, aim to approach all interactions with curiosity, humility, and a willingness to listen.

“I’m not familiar with this practice—would you be comfortable helping me understand it better?”

Avoid making assumptions. Respect differences in communication styles, personal space, or decision-making, and consult with your Regional Support Officer if you feel uncertain.

TRY THIS

Activity

Discuss what you would do if a Companion divulged to you that they were currently a victim of Domestic Violence.

Can you name three things you have learned about another culture in recent times?

Share with the group some successful strategies in discussing sensitive issues with Companions.

