

Dealing With Aggressive or Abusive Clients policy

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Dealing With Aggressive or Abusive Clients policy

Many of our clients can be anxious, stressed, and impatient. Occasionally, this makes them aggressive or even abusive towards their adviser.

Citizens Advice Westminster has ZERO TOLERANCE of all aggressive and abusive behaviour whenever it occurs. We have a strict policy on excluding clients, and we will implement it when required.

1. Other policies

It is important to familiarise yourself with Dignity at work, Health and Safety (add link) and Excluding clients policies. (Add link)

2. Aggressive or abusive behaviour may include:

- swearing
- abusive language
- discriminatory language or behaviour
- harassment
- being violent or threatening violence

3. Aggressive or other unacceptable behaviour which may lead to withdrawal of service may also include

- persistently refusing to respond to feedback or advice
- demanding things in a short amount of time
- asking to speak to a specific member of staff when it's not possible, or contacting lots of staff to try to get a different outcome
- continually changing issues or raising unrelated ones
- demanding help for something outside our advice areas
- continuing to raise the same issue when we've already helped you or we can't help more
- continuing to ask for sensitive or confidential information we aren't allowed to share
- making numerous of complaints without giving us the chance to resolve them, or make an unreasonable number of data protection rights requests
- threatening use of the complaints procedure in order to achieve an outcome.

4. Do's and Don'ts

☐ Spot the warning signs - When interviewing clients, always be aware of changes in their behaviour especially if you are discussing something that could result in an angry or irritated response. It is very rare for aggression or violence to come from nowhere

☐ Be ready to make a quick exit or to end the call. If you are in a face to face setting, make sure that you are sitting nearest the exit route in the interview space, but also ensure that the client's exit route is not blocked;

- DO NOT take them into a separate interview room
- When in doubt get out - always keep yourself and others safe.

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□ Keep calm - Use your communication skills to defuse a difficult situation, speaking in a calm, measured voice, and using your body language to maintain a calm atmosphere; Never meet aggression with aggression;

□ Keep your distance - Avoid entering the client's personal space or touching them, as it could make them feel threatened and escalate the situation.

All interview rooms are fitted with panic alarms and it is your responsibility to ensure you are clear about where these are located, as well as any evacuation procedures which might apply.

- Trust your instincts – in an office environment, if possible, interview the client in the open public space
- Never underestimate a threat.

5 . If you cannot calm the situation:

- Be assertive and calm but avoid being aggressive yourself
- Get away from the aggressor quickly
- Use exit strategies — have a pre-planned excuse, e.g, "I just need to check something with my supervisor"
- Use diversion techniques to distract them whilst you make your exit
- If you need help urgently, shout for it.

6. Responding to aggressive and unacceptable behaviour

- Set expectations at the start of every interview about your role which you can refer back to if needed
- Where appropriate make use of clarifying questions to give the client the opportunity to withdraw a statement where appropriate
- If the behaviour persists issue a clear warning that you will end the call or interview if it continues.
- End the interview if the behaviour persists.
- Immediately notify your duty supervisor and complete an incident form.
- Remember: Citizens Advice Westminster does not tolerate aggressive or unacceptable behaviour. It is important we have a consistent approach to tackling this behaviour when it arises.

All Citizens Advice Westminster staff will immediately help anyone struggling with aggressive or abusive clients.

7. Reporting and recording

Always tell your supervisor about any incident outlined in 2 or 3 above and complete an incident report form (attached). It is important to report near-misses as well as actual incidents. The Duty Supervisor can also complete an incident form on behalf of an adviser or assessor if required.

By law we must provide you with support and re-assess any risks so that if needed, we can put in extra control measures to keep us all safe.

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The organisation has in place a confidential EAP support service, through a separate provider, which the employee may want to take up. Full details are with the HR Operations Administrator.

8. Training and reflective practice

Citizens Advice Westminster will provide regular training on this policy and provide regular opportunities for reflective practice for advisers and assessors to share experiences and ensure we are responding in a consistent way.

9. What will happen to the incident form

Each incident form will be recorded by the Duty Supervisor and reviewed by the Head of Contracts and Services who will provide feedback to the originator of the incident in every case either directly or via the Duty Supervisor.

Follow up action including Excluding Clients is covered in the relevant policy.

Abusive and Aggressive Behaviour Form

Person Reporting the incident:	
Name:	
Role:	
Where the incident occurred:	
Person affected by the Incident including name and role	
Client number or other information about abuser, if known:	
Date and time of the incident:	
Witnesses:	
Incident type:	☐ Verbal abuse / threat of violence ☐ Physical attack ☐ Aggressive gestures ☐ Offensive language ☐ Shouting ☐ Racist abuse ☐ Sexist Abuse ☐ Other unacceptable behaviour (see policy for examples). Please state:
Details of the incident, please be specific	
Any injury sustained or property damaged:	
Duty Supervisor comment/ recommendation	
Action Taken, and by whom	
Incident review / risk assessment / any remedial action required:	
Name of reviewer:	