

A Quick Reference Guide on

MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS



INFORMATION FOR THOSE WHO WORK WITH VETERANS, WAR WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS, SERVING AND FORMER DEFENCE FORCE MEMBERS, ELIGIBLE AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE MEMBERS WITH OVERSEAS SERVICE, THEIR DEPENDANTS AND CARERS



Australian Government

Department of Veterans' Affairs

www.OpenArms.gov.au

1800 011 046

UNCOOPERATIVE BEHAVIOUR



Do

- Listen first to understand the person's perspective and concerns.
- Ask questions such as *What do you think is a fair way to deal with this situation?* or *How can I help to resolve this problem?*
- Let them know what you are able to do to help.
- If they continue to insist on something that is unreasonable or that you can't deliver, you may have to repeat this (gently yet firmly) several times before they hear you.
- Use reasonable language and try to stay calm.
- Agree on an action plan that includes the things you will do and the things they need to do.
- Refer the person to your supervisor or manager if you are unable to resolve the problem.

✗ *It is unhelpful to*

- Let the person's attitude and concerns become your problem.
- Become flustered.
- Show your frustration in your gestures, voice tone and other signals.
- Talk over the person.
- Raise your voice or shout.

UNCOOPERATIVE
BEHAVIOUR

ANGER AND
AGGRESSION

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

SELF-HARM
OR SUICIDE

SOCIALLY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOUR

INTOXICATION

GRIEVING

CONFUSION AND
DEMENTIA

ANGER AND AGGRESSION

#* &
?! %



Do

- Let the person speak.
- Listen carefully to the reasons for their anger.
- Acknowledge that they are upset or frustrated. (Say *You seem to be quite upset.*)
- If applicable, apologise for minor errors made by your office or organisation.
- Show that you are listening by clearly summarising the complaint in your own words.
- Assure them that you are interested in helping them to resolve the issue.
- Ask questions to draw them out. (Say *Can you tell me a bit more about what happened?*)

It is unhelpful to

- Tell the person to calm down or 'get a grip'.
- Raise your voice.
- Interrupt.
- Try to complete their sentences for them.
- Promise something that you know you can't deliver.
- Use the word 'but'.

UNCOOPERATIVE
BEHAVIOUR

ANGER AND
AGGRESSION

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

SELF-HARM
OR SUICIDE

SOCIALLY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOUR

INTOXICATION

GRIEVING

CONFUSION AND
DEMENTIA

1800 011 046

ANXIETY



Do

- Assure the person that they can take their time.
- Use a calm and reassuring tone of voice.
- Acknowledge that it may be difficult for them to speak to you about their concern.
- Gently offer the option to speak with someone of the same gender, if you think they would prefer that. (Say *Would you be more comfortable speaking with one of our male/female staff about this?*)
- Listen carefully and ask questions to let them know that you want to work with them to resolve the situation.

It is unhelpful to

- Rush someone by interrupting with your assumptions about their problem. (This can compound their anxiety or make them angry.)
- Adopt a tone of voice that suggests you are bored or irritated if they are unable to explain the situation.
- Show frustration if they are unable to make a decision.

UNCOOPERATIVE
BEHAVIOUR

ANGER AND
AGGRESSION

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

SELF-HARM
OR SUICIDE

SOCIALLY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOUR

INTOXICATION

GRIEVING

CONFUSION AND
DEMENTIA

DEPRESSION



Do

- Be interested in what the person is saying.
- Be encouraging and positive.
- Be prepared to take a little extra time.
- Present information in small segments.
- Ask questions to identify the problem.
- Ask questions at a slow pace so that you do not overwhelm them.
- If appropriate, acknowledge that they seem a bit 'flat'.
- Check that you have understood what they have said.
- Encourage them to write down the steps you want them to take.

✗ *It is unhelpful to*

- Rush the person.
- Present information too quickly.
- Overwhelm them with too much information.

UNCOOPERATIVE
BEHAVIOUR

ANGER AND
AGGRESSION

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

SELF-HARM
OR SUICIDE

SOCIALLY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOUR

INTOXICATION

GRIEVING

CONFUSION AND
DEMENTIA

1800 011 046

SELF-HARM AND THREATS OF SUICIDE

next page 'it is unhelpful to'...



Do

- Stay calm.
- If there are indications that the person may be considering self-harm or suicide, ask directly *Are you having any thoughts of harming yourself?*
- If you are talking to them on the phone, find out where they are calling from and take down their name, phone number and address.
- Show your concern and that you are prepared to listen. (Say *I'm worried about you and I want to help or I'm concerned about what you're saying.*) (Take your time.)
- Acknowledge their sadness or despair. (Say *I can hear that you're very upset.*)
- Accept what they are telling you.
- If you are in any way unsure about how to handle the situation, pass the call to a supervisor/ manager or arrange to have some back-up from a colleague. (Say *I'm not sure if I'm the best person to help you any further. I think that [name of colleague] will be better able to help with your situation. If it's all right with you, I'll transfer your call to them. Please stay on the line while I do that now.*)
- Afterwards, speak to your supervisor or manager about the incident.
- Follow your organisation's protocols for managing critical **incident reporting** relating to threats of suicide or other forms of self-harm.

Continued on next page →

UNCOOPERATIVE
BEHAVIOUR

ANGER AND
AGGRESSION

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

SELF-HARM
OR SUICIDE

SOCIALLY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOUR

INTOXICATION

GRIEVING

CONFUSION AND
DEMENTIA

SELF-HARM AND THREATS OF SUICIDE

Continued from previous page



X *It is unhelpful to*

- Panic.
- Sound shocked by anything they tell you.
- Dismiss or belittle their problem.
- Joke about suicide.
- Try to cheer them up.
- Assume that the situation will resolve itself.
- Offer advice or try to be their counsellor.
- Allow yourself to be sworn to secrecy.
- Debate the pros and cons of self-harm or suicide.

UNCOOPERATIVE
BEHAVIOUR

ANGER AND
AGGRESSION

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

**SELF-HARM
OR SUICIDE**

SOCIALLY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOUR

INTOXICATION

GRIEVING

CONFUSION AND
DEMENTIA

SOCIALLY INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR



Do

- Remain calm.
- Redirect the person's attention to the task you are working on.
- If the behaviour makes you uncomfortable, tell them immediately that it is unacceptable.
- Set limits on your interaction by clearly stating that the behaviour is unacceptable. (*Say Mr Smith, I don't think that behaviour is appropriate.*)
- Talk to your supervisor or manager about what happened.
- Follow your organisation's **incident reporting guidelines**.

 *It is unhelpful to*

- Laugh or giggle.
- Make jokes or dismissive comments.
- Make derogatory comments that put the person down.

UNCOOPERATIVE
BEHAVIOUR

ANGER AND
AGGRESSION

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

SELF-HARM
OR SUICIDE

**SOCIALLY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOUR**

INTOXICATION

GRIEVING

CONFUSION AND
DEMENTIA

1800 011 046

INTOXICATION



✓ Do

- If the person seems alcohol or drug affected, be patient and see whether there is any benefit in continuing the conversation.
- If the person is clearly intoxicated, there is little point in trying to assist them with their query. In this case:
 - provide brief information related to the query
 - suggest that you follow up with further information on another occasion
 - make another time to talk
 - offer to send them a more detailed response.
- Ask if there is someone with them who could help you understand their problem. If not, agree on another time to call or meet.
- If the person is aggressive, please refer to the section in this guide on anger and aggression.

✗ *It is unhelpful to*

- Ask *Are you drunk or on drugs?*
- Try to reason with them.
- Become angry or irritated.

UNCOOPERATIVE
BEHAVIOUR

ANGER AND
AGGRESSION

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

SELF-HARM
OR SUICIDE

SOCIALLY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOUR

INTOXICATION

GRIEVING

CONFUSION AND
DEMENTIA

GRIEVING

next page 'it is unhelpful to'...



✓ Do

- If the person has lost a loved one, acknowledge their grief. (Say *I'm sorry for your loss.*)
- If they are grieving for a loss of lifestyle or independence, acknowledge this. (Say *I can hear/see that this is a difficult time for you.*)
- Be aware that they may want to talk about their loss.
- Listen carefully and try not to interrupt if they talk about their loss.
- Offer additional assistance or time to complete a task if necessary.
- Simplify instructions or information if necessary.
- Accept the presence of a friend, relative or other support person.
- If their request is unclear, say *How can I best help you at this time?*
- If they are distressed and want to have a prolonged conversation about their loss, suggest a referral to Open Arms.

UNCOOPERATIVE
BEHAVIOUR

ANGER AND
AGGRESSION

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

SELF-HARM
OR SUICIDE

SOCIALLY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOUR

INTOXICATION

GRIEVING

CONFUSION AND
DEMENTIA

Continued on next page →

GRIEVING

Continued from previous page



X *It is unhelpful to*

- Assume that the person is always like this.
- Assume that emotional distress is a sign of character weakness or mental illness.
- End the conversation just because they are tearful; instead, ask if it would help to call them back another time.
- Try to become their grief counsellor. (Refer them to Open Arms instead.)
- Say you understand or share their loss. (We can rarely do that adequately.)

UNCOOPERATIVE
BEHAVIOUR

ANGER AND
AGGRESSION

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

SELF-HARM
OR SUICIDE

SOCIALLY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOUR

INTOXICATION

GRIEVING

CONFUSION AND
DEMENTIA

1800 011 046

CONFUSION AND DEMENTIA



Do

- Be sincere and understanding, and listen carefully.
- Speak in a soft, unhurried tone of voice.
- Use simple sentences and instructions.
- Try to reduce any background noise and distractions.
- Speak clearly and allow them time to respond—they may need more time than someone who is not confused.
- Be patient if they ask the same questions several times.
- If they do not seem to understand what you are saying, ask if there is someone such as a partner or carer who can assist.

It is unhelpful to

- Argue with a confused person.
- Treat them like a child.
- Raise your voice or shout.
- Show frustration if they are unable to make a decision.

UNCOOPERATIVE
BEHAVIOUR

ANGER AND
AGGRESSION

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

SELF-HARM
OR SUICIDE

SOCIALLY
INAPPROPRIATE
BEHAVIOUR

INTOXICATION

GRIEVING

CONFUSION AND
DEMENTIA