

## Managing unreasonable complainant conduct – short guide

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This short guide provides key information about managing unreasonable complainant conduct.

For detailed guidance, please see our full guide: *Managing unreasonable complainant conduct: A manual for frontline staff, supervisors and senior managers*.

### What is unreasonable complainant conduct?

For conduct to be unreasonable, it must clearly go beyond the norm of situational stress commonly experienced by complainants when they bring a concern to your attention.

There are five categories of unreasonable complainant conduct:

- unreasonable persistence;
- unreasonable demands;
- unreasonable arguments;
- unreasonable behaviour; and
- unreasonable lack of co-operation.

Unreasonable complainant conduct could include:

- displaying confronting behaviour (rude, angry, aggressive);
- displaying manipulative behaviour (overly ingratiating, tears etc);
- sending rude, confronting, threatening letters, faxes or emails;
- numerous and unnecessary communications;

- making direct and indirect threats of self harm;
- making direct and indirect threats of harm to others; and
- threats to damage property.

## Strategies to manage unreasonable complainant conduct

It is important to remember that even where a person's conduct may be unreasonable, they could have a valid complaint and that complaint should be handled appropriately. The key to managing unreasonable complainant conduct is to give fair consideration to the complaint, while ensuring there is no undue imposition on your agency or staff in doing so.

Strategies to manage unreasonable complainant conduct include:

- explain your agency's processes and policies;
- identify and acknowledge the situation;
- be firm and focussed on the issue;
- make clear what you:
  - can do;
  - can't do;
  - won't do;
- check the complainant's expectations; and
- correct the complainant's expectations.

## Communicating with complainants

When communicating with complainants, do:

- echo;
- express empathy;
- acknowledge effect;
- acknowledge the complainant's point of view;
- probe for further clarification;
- apologise where appropriate;

- use language of co-operation; and
- use active listening.

### Above and below the line

Acknowledge

Agree/accept

Clarify

Check for understanding

Apologise (if appropriate)

-----**avoid what's below the line**-----

Disagree/defend/deny

Argue

Fight words

Justify/excuses

Distract/humour

React to an attack

Yeah, but