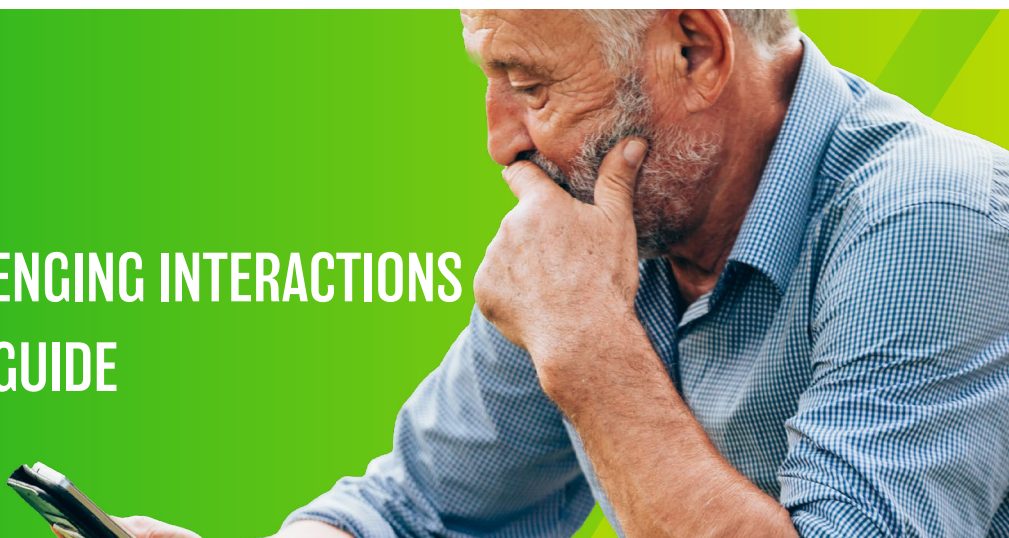


# GUIDE

## MANAGING CHALLENGING INTERACTIONS COMMUNICATION GUIDE



Sporting organisation staff and volunteers are faced with challenging interactions in their role from time to time. This can include dealing with conflict, aggressive people, or resolving a dispute over a decision that is tense and may have high stakes. This can occur in a face-to-face or over-the-phone setting, as well as via text, email, or social media.

When you are faced with challenging interactions, sometimes emotions can run high, and it can be difficult to know how to handle these situations. The purpose of this **Managing Challenging Interactions Communication Guide** is to provide you with some information and examples on responding to angry, abusive, or highly emotional communications.

Use the **CARE Framework** to help you handle these types of situations so you can facilitate constructive and productive conversations with your sport's community members.

### CREATE

CREATE a safe space for the conversation.

- Remaining calm, take three slow deep breaths and seek some time out if you need to.
- Present with an open and non-judgmental attitude.
- Be mindful of body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice.
- Ensure the conversation is happening in a private space.

### REACH

REACH a shared understanding of the situation.

- Identifying areas of agreement and disagreement, and seek to find common ground.
- Summarising the discussion and repeating back what you and the other party has said ensures that you both understand each other's perspective.
- Demonstrating that you are considering an alternative perspective and suggest brainstorming possible solutions together.

### ACKNOWLEDGE

ACKNOWLEDGE the key issue at hand.

- Empathise, recognise and summarise.
- Say:  
*"I understand the issues that you have raised and how it has made you feel this way."*

### ESTABLISH

ESTABLISH next steps and any follow-up that is required.

- Agree on a plan of action for addressing the issue, including specific steps and responsibilities for everyone involved.
- Agree on a follow-up to ensure that the issue has been fully resolved.
- End the conversation on a positive note by saying:  
*"While we may not have agreed on everything, I appreciate your passion and understanding. I too am incredibly passionate about our sport. I look forward to your input in future discussions."*

## FACE-TO-FACE/PHONE

- Stay calm. Always refrain from also becoming angry or upset.
- Take the time to listen to the issues and concerns. Do not interrupt or talk over. Indicate listening by:
  - Appropriate eye contact.
  - Nodding.
  - Saying “mmm” and “I’m hearing you”.
- Acknowledge the emotion as you see it, such as by saying “I can see that you are very angry”.
- Demonstrate your understanding of the conversation by summarising the issues, thoughts, and feelings discussed.
- Consider where the conversation is taking place. Try to have a conversation in a private and safe space, not in front of a group. If possible, a space that is still visible to others either through a window or by being a little removed from others is encouraged to ensure your own protection. If this is not possible, it may be advisable to have a colleague or trusted person stand by as a witness and support for both parties.
- If emotions are running too high, it may be best to pause the conversation and reschedule a time to continue the discussion once people have had a chance to calm down.

Examples of phrases to use if confronted with an angry, abusive, or upset community member:

*“I am feeling very uncomfortable because of the raised voices and language that is being used. It’s essential that we have this discussion in a safe and supportive way for everyone involved. Can we agree to proceed in a respectful way?”*

*“I just want to remind you that <this is my workplace> or <I am a volunteer>. I would like to help and continue this conversation but can only do so if it is done in a respectful way.”*

*“I feel that our conversation is getting a little tense. I am happy to continue to help, but I feel uncomfortable right now, so I am hoping that we can be kind and considerate of each other.”*

*“It is really important to us that things remain respectful as this looks after everyone’s wellbeing. If things remain a bit highly stressed, it might be best for me to have someone else contact you to assist.”*

*“I am sorry that I have not been able to assist you in the way that you would like. I think it is best for us to end the conversation for the moment but will have someone reach out to you to follow up. All the best.”*

*“I can see that you are feeling really upset right now. That is okay and I completely understand. Do you want to proceed or take some time out?”*

## TEXT AND EMAIL

- Always refrain from responding in an angry or upset way.
- Rather than engaging in an emotionally charged way via email or text, it is recommended to pursue the topic face-to-face or over the phone.

Examples of phrases to use if confronted with an angry, abusive, or upset community member:

*“I appreciate you bringing this to my attention. I can see that you are feeling very strongly about this. Can I suggest a time for us to discuss this together?”*

*“Thank you for expressing your concerns. I understand you’re upset. Could we arrange a call or a meeting to discuss this in more detail?”*

*“I can see this matter is important to you. It would be beneficial for us to discuss this directly. Can we set up a time for a call or face-to-face meeting?”*

*“I acknowledge your feelings and your perspective on this issue. To ensure we address this properly, can we arrange a direct conversation either over the phone or in person?”*

## SOCIAL MEDIA

- In the first instance, if there is one - refer to your Social Media policy. This should provide the guidelines on how your organisation responds to commentary on your social media platforms.
- If you do not have a Social Media policy or it does not cover the specific situation you are dealing with you may:
  - Remove the commentary.
  - Provide no commentary and get in touch with individual(s) directly.
  - Provide a calm, professional response that avoids personal attacks and seeks to de-escalate the situation. This could involve rectifying any inaccurate data or dispelling disinformation.

## HELPFUL HINTS

Remember to look after your mental health and wellbeing if you feel uncomfortable following a challenging interaction.

- Debrief with a colleague.
- Take some time out in the fresh air before responding to, or after, a difficult interaction.
- Have the confidence to end communications if behaviour, tone or language becomes unacceptable.
- Check out the [True Sport - Community Links](#) webpage for information on where to access mental health and wellbeing services if you feel that you need some professional support.



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**In an Emergency Dial 000**  
**For support call Lifeline 13 11 14**  
or visit [True Sport - Community Links](#) for more services.

