Knowledge Gateway

Practice Guidance and Information

Dialogue & Conflict with Service Users

Navigating Hostility and Intolerance: Practical Guidance for Voluntary Organisations and Community Groups

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Introduction

This guidance document equips volunteers, voluntary-sector staff and managers with psychologically informed approaches for safe, respectful and emotionally regulated interactions with service users - the people across Scotland's diverse communities who access support, take part in activities, seek information or engage with services from voluntary, public or community organisations. It strengthens calm, ethical, and compassionate practice across public-facing, support-focused and high-pressure environments where situations can become sensitive, distressed, or unpredictable.

Each topic includes two types of support: short Top Tips that offer quick, easy-to-use prompts, and Core Set resources that provide fuller guidance, structured tools, and Scotland-specific models.

The Top Tips act as rapid reference points that volunteers and staff can use before an interaction, during moments of uncertainty, distress, or escalation, or afterwards to reflect and strengthen future practice. They provide immediate, emotionally safe actions that help steady communication, reduce defensiveness and support calm, proportionate responses.

The Core Set offers deeper learning for training, supervision, planning or more complex situations, giving organisations a comprehensive set of approaches to psychologically informed, trauma-aware, and sustainable practice. They include structured models, behaviour-aware communication tools, de-escalation techniques, and Scotland-specific guidance that supports safe, confident, and regulated interactions.

Psychologically informed support is organised into five core interaction skills that volunteers and staff rely on when situations become sensitive, distressed, or unpredictable:

- **Dialogue Skills & Constructive Conversations** – creating calm, grounded and respectful communication that reduces defensiveness and supports clarity.
- **Conflict Management with Service Users** – recognising early signs of tension, responding proportionately, and maintaining emotional and physical safety.
- **Managing Aggressive or Distressed Behaviour** – using trauma-aware de-escalation techniques to reduce intensity and restore regulation.
- **Boundary Setting & Expectations** – maintaining safe, predictable, and respectful limits that protect volunteers, staff, and service users.
- **Trauma-Aware Communication** – using language, pacing and grounding techniques that reduce shame, fear, and emotional overload.

Together, these subtopics bring together the strongest available guidance on:

- constructive, psychologically informed communication
- early-stage conflict management and safe intervention
- trauma-aware language and emotional safety principles

- behaviour-based risk reduction techniques
- respectful, predictable boundary setting
- narrative-based hostility and harm awareness

This creates a robust, coherent foundation for safe, respectful, and emotionally regulated interactions with service users across Scotland's third sector - supporting calm, confident and compassionate responses in both everyday conversations and high-tension situations.

How to Use This Guidance

This guidance is designed to be practical, accessible, and easy to use in real situations. It supports volunteers, staff, and managers to communicate safely, calmly, and confidently with service users - particularly in moments that involve distress, uncertainty, emotional load, or emerging tension.

Each topic includes two types of support:

- **Top Tips** – short, quick-reference prompts you can use before, during or after an interaction or situation that may involve distress, uncertainty, or emotional intensity. These provide immediate, psychologically informed, and trauma-aware actions that help steady communication, reduce escalation and support emotional safety for volunteers, staff, and the people they work with.

- **Core Set** – fuller guidance, structured tools and Scotland-specific models drawn from the strongest available evidence. These provide deeper learning for training, supervision, reflective practice or more complex situations involving conflict, distress, behavioural risk, or trauma-linked communication.

Together, the Top Tips and Core Set offer a clear two-step support structure: rapid practical advice when you need it, and more detailed guidance when you want to build skills, strengthen team practice or respond to complex, emotionally demanding or unpredictable contexts.

You can dip into individual sections as needed, or use the full set to support training, supervision, volunteer management, wellbeing planning, or organisational development. The guidance is designed to be flexible - something volunteers and staff can use in the moment, and something organisations can use to build safer, more confident practice over time.

This guidance sits alongside, and does not replace, your organisation's own policies and procedures. Volunteers and staff should always follow local safeguarding, incident-reporting, escalation, and wellbeing processes, and use this guidance to support safe, consistent practice within those frameworks.

Methodology

This project used a structured process to identify, assess, and categorise guidance relevant to staff, volunteers and organisations responding to hostility, misinformation, and community tensions. The NCVO framework (Protecting Our People and Protecting Our Work) provided the organising structure. A targeted web search and review of Scotland-relevant organisations, TSIs, equality bodies and specialist safety or communications groups was conducted, supported by topic-based and Scotland-specific keywords. All materials found were screened for relevance, clarity, and practical usefulness.

Each resource was coded and assessed using a consistent scoring framework covering reliability, evidence base, relevance to Scotland, practicality, and coverage of key risks. Metadata and scores were compiled into a filterable spreadsheet matrix to support comparison and gap analysis. The mapping highlighted strengths, weaknesses, and areas where further guidance was needed, including topics with limited coverage and areas where staff or volunteers were particularly vulnerable.

Once mapped, the resources were organised into topic-specific documents aligned with the core areas of the framework (sensitive conversations, differing viewpoints, conflict resolution, psychological safety, and inclusive/anti-racist dialogue). These documents brought together the strongest guidance for each area and provided a clear structure for review.

The working group then reviewed each topic-specific document using a structured Hostile Environments Framework Review Form. The checklist guided reviewers through subtopic relevance, clarity of purpose, suitability of core set resources, Scotland-specific applicability, accessibility, strengths, gaps, and overall usability for volunteers, staff, and small organisations. Reviewers identified broken links, highlighted any items that were weak or unsuitable, confirmed where guidance was strong and practical, and suggested minor edits to strengthen clarity and relevance.

Feedback from the checklist review was collated and actioned across all topic documents. Resources were updated, replaced, or removed where necessary; broken links were corrected; and framing was refined to ensure consistency, trauma-aware practice, and Scotland-specific relevance. This process strengthened the structure and accessibility of the final guidance.

Following this review, concise Top Tips were distilled from the strongest Core Set resources in each topic. These Top Tips provide quick, easy-to-use prompts that give readers an immediate entry point into safe, trauma-aware practice. The more detailed Core Set resources then offer deeper guidance, models, and Scotland-specific tools. Together, this two-step structure ensures that volunteers, staff, and managers can access both rapid practical advice and more comprehensive support when navigating hostility, tension, or sensitive conversations.

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We are grateful to the working group for their collaborative review and valuable feedback. Their careful assessment of the core sets, identification of gaps and practical suggestions played a key role in shaping the final guidance and strengthening its usefulness for organisations across Scotland.

1. Dialogue Skills & Constructive Conversations

Constructive conversations can help volunteers and staff engage calmly, respectfully, and effectively with service users, even when emotions are high or topics are sensitive. Dialogue skills can support understanding, empathy, and constructive engagement with people whose experiences, perspectives or concerns may differ from our own. They can also contribute to early-stage conflict management, trauma-aware communication, and respectful boundary-setting.

Effective dialogue can help organisations to:

- promote calm, grounded and respectful communication.
- notice signs that someone may be upset or distressed.
- respond without escalating conflict or tension.
- use respectful language that helps people feel safe and supported.
- navigate difficult topics with clarity and compassion.
- maintain boundaries while preserving dignity and respect.
- help reduce risk through behaviour-based communication techniques.

Dialogue skills are not about persuading, correcting, or "winning" an argument. They are about listening to understand another person's experiences, views, and concerns, while supporting respectful and constructive communication.

1.1 Top Tips for Staff and Volunteers

The following Top Tips provide clear, trauma-aware actions volunteers and staff can use to help support calm, respectful, and constructive conversations with service users. They are designed as quick, easy-to-apply prompts that help steady interactions, reduce defensiveness, and maintain emotional safety when situations feel sensitive, uncertain, or potentially tense.

These tips act as rapid reference points that volunteers and staff can draw on before beginning a conversation, during moments where emotions rise or clarity is needed, or afterwards to reflect and strengthen future practice. They focus on listening carefully, taking conversations at a manageable pace, communicating clearly, setting appropriate boundaries, and helping people feel safe and heard.

- **Slow the pace.** Calm tone and gentle pacing help regulate emotion.
- **Listen first.** Allow service users to express concerns without interruption.
- **Acknowledge concerns.** Show that you have heard and understood the person's specific concern before responding.
- **Use grounding language.** Short, simple sentences can help people take in information more easily.
- **Ask open questions.** “Can you tell me more about what’s happening for you?”
- **Avoid defensiveness.** Focus on understanding, not correcting.
- **Reflect back.** Summarise what you have heard to show clarity and care.

- **Stay values-led.** Anchor communication in respect, dignity, and safety.
- **Know your boundaries.** Volunteers and staff should not feel pressured to enter debates or discussions that fall outside their role, expertise, or organisational remit.
- **End well.** Close conversations with clarity, reassurance, and next steps.

By using these prompts, volunteers and staff can help create calmer interactions, support constructive communication, maintain role clarity, and support service users in ways that are compassionate, regulated and aligned with trauma-aware practice across Scotland's third sector.

1.2 Core Set

The following core set of resources offer practical, evidence-informed guidance on constructive conversations, emotional regulation, and psychologically safe dialogue. They provide Scotland-specific tools, trauma-aware communication models and volunteer-friendly frameworks for calm, grounded interaction.

Title (Linked)	Brief Description	Format	Audience
SCCR – Constructive Conversations & Emotional Regulation	Practical tools for having difficult conversations, regulating emotion, and maintaining calm, constructive dialogue. Strong Scotland-specific resource.	Toolkit	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Scouts UK – Prepare for the Conversation	Accessible guidance for volunteers on preparing for sensitive conversations, setting tone, and managing expectations.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff
NHS Scotland Workforce – Supportive & Difficult Conversations	Evidence-informed guidance on supportive dialogue, emotional safety and handling difficult conversations in regulated environments.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Scottish Government – Inclusive Communication Toolkit	Scotland-specific tools for communicating clearly with people who have diverse communication needs. Strong for reducing misunderstanding and supporting constructive dialogue.	Toolkit	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
BPS – Constructive Conversations on Difficult Topics	Tools for navigating difficult topics, reducing defensiveness, and maintaining psychological safety.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Harvard Graduate School of Education – How to Disagree Better	Strategies for disagreeing constructively, reducing conflict, and maintaining respectful dialogue.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

2. Conflict Management with Service Users

Conflict with service users can arise from distress, unmet needs, misunderstanding, frustration, trauma triggers, or environmental pressures. Volunteers and staff can benefit from calm, psychologically informed tools that help them recognise early warning signs, respond to emerging conflict, support safety, and preserve dignity.

Effective conflict management can help organisations to:

- identify early signs of tension or distress.
- respond calmly and proportionately to emerging conflict.
- use behaviour-based risk reduction techniques.
- communicate calmly and respectfully to help people feel safe.
- set boundaries without escalating the situation.
- help volunteers and staff respond to aggression, hostility, or manipulation safely and appropriately.
- follow relevant wellbeing, safety and safeguarding policies and procedures.

Conflict management is not about “winning” - **it is about helping to reduce harm, support safety and manage conflict in a constructive and proportionate way.**

2.1 Top Tips for Staff and Volunteers

The following tips provide practical, psychologically informed actions volunteers and staff can use to recognise early warning signs, respond appropriately to emerging tension, support safety and preserve dignity. They are designed as quick, easy-to-apply prompts that help steady communication, support clear decision-making and protect both volunteers and service users during moments where behaviour, emotion or tone begins to shift.

These prompts act as rapid reference points that volunteers and staff can draw on before engaging in a potentially sensitive interaction, during early signs of tension, or afterwards to reflect and strengthen future responses. They emphasise noticing emotional cues, using grounding techniques, keeping language simple and predictable, maintaining clear boundaries, and knowing when safe withdrawal is required - the core components of effective conflict management in psychologically informed practice.

- **Notice early signs.** Raised voice, pacing, agitation, or withdrawal often precede conflict.
- **Stay grounded.** Slow breathing, calm tone, and steady posture reduce escalation.
- **Acknowledge emotion.** “I can see this is really difficult right now.”
- **Give space.** Physical and conversational pauses help regulate distress.
- **Avoid confrontation.** Do not argue, correct, or challenge during escalation.

- **Use simple language.** Short sentences can help people take in information more easily.
- **Offer choices.** “Would you prefer to talk here or step outside for a moment?”
- **Protect boundaries.** Volunteers should not tolerate aggression, threats, or unsafe behaviour.
- **Know withdrawal triggers.** If safety decreases, volunteers should step back and escalate.
- **Log incidents.** Patterns of conflict help improve future planning and support.

By using these tips, volunteers and staff can respond calmly and proportionately, reduce defensiveness, maintain emotional and physical safety, and prevent situations from escalating into distress or aggression. They support confident, regulated, and respectful communication across Scotland’s third sector, particularly in public-facing or high-pressure environments where conflict can emerge quickly.

2.2 Core Set

The following core set of resources provide structured, evidence-informed guidance on conflict management with service users. They include behaviour-based risk reduction tools, hostility-awareness frameworks and trauma-aware communication models that support safe, proportionate responses in emotionally charged environments.

Title (Linked)	Brief Description	Format	Audience
HOPE not hate – Safety & Security Advice	Practical tools for managing hostility, intimidation, and emotionally charged interactions.	Toolkit	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
HSE – Violence at Work	Evidence-based guidance on preventing violence and aggression in public-facing roles. Essential for volunteers and staff encountering distressed or unpredictable behaviour.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
BPS – Constructive Conversations	Tools for navigating difficult topics, reducing defensiveness, and maintaining psychological safety during conflict.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Harvard Graduate School of Education – How to Disagree Better	Strategies for disagreeing constructively, reducing conflict, and maintaining respectful dialogue.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
QSIR – Managing Conflict Module	Structured guidance on conflict triggers, emotional regulation, and safe intervention. Strong for regulated or support-focused environments.	Training Module	Staff, Managers
D-Hub – Anti-Authoritarian Conflict Tools	Tools for recognising authoritarian behaviours, harmful narratives, and conflict-driven hostility.	Toolkit	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

ACAS – Conflict & Resolution	Clear guidance on conflict resolution, early-stage intervention, and constructive communication. Useful for volunteer-involving organisations.	Webpage	Staff, Managers

3. Managing Aggressive or Distressed Behaviour

Service users may become distressed, overwhelmed, frustrated, or struggle to manage strong emotions due to trauma, unmet needs, environmental stressors, or personal circumstances. Volunteers and staff can benefit from calm, psychologically informed de-escalation tools that help reduce intensity, support safety, and preserve dignity.

Effective de-escalation can help organisations to:

- recognise early signs of distress or emotional overload.
- respond calmly and proportionately to escalating behaviour.
- use trauma-aware language that helps people feel safe and respected.
- reduce risk through behaviour-based positioning and pacing.
- maintain boundaries while offering compassion and clarity.
- protect volunteers and staff from aggression, manipulation, or unsafe dynamics.
- follow relevant wellbeing, safety and safeguarding policies and procedures.

De-escalation is not about controlling behaviour - **it is about helping to reduce intensity, restoring safety, and supporting emotional regulation**.

3.1 Top Tips for Staff and Volunteers

The following tips offer clear, trauma-aware actions volunteers and staff can use to help de-escalate distressed or aggressive behaviour safely. They are designed as quick, easy-to-apply prompts that help steady interactions, reduce intensity and support calm, proportionate decision-making when emotions rise, behaviour becomes unpredictable or situations feel unsafe.

These prompts act as rapid reference points that volunteers and staff can draw on before approaching a distressed individual, during moments of escalation, or afterwards to reflect and strengthen future practice. They emphasise self-regulation, slow pacing, grounding language, maintaining physical space, protecting boundaries, and offering safe, simple choices - the foundations of effective de-escalation in psychologically informed practice.

- **Regulate yourself first.** Slow breathing, grounded posture, and calm tone reduce escalation.
- **Give space.** Physical distance and pauses help service users regain control.
- **Use simple, slow language.** Short sentences can help people take in information more easily when they are distressed.
- **Acknowledge emotion.** “I can see this feels really overwhelming right now.”
- **Avoid confrontation.** Do not argue, correct, or challenge during escalation.
- **Offer choices.** “Would you prefer to sit down or step outside for a moment?”
- **Lower your voice.** People often respond to the tone used with them.

- **Protect boundaries.** Volunteers and staff should withdraw if behaviour becomes unsafe.
- **Avoid physical contact.** Touch can escalate distress or trigger trauma responses.
- **End with clarity.** Summarise next steps once calm is restored.

By using these tips, volunteers and staff can reduce emotional overload, prevent escalation, maintain personal safety, and support service users to regain regulation. They help create calmer interactions, protect volunteers from harm, and uphold trauma-aware communication across Scotland's third sector, particularly in public-facing or high-pressure environments where distress or aggression can emerge quickly.

3.2 Core Set

The following core set of resources provide evidence-informed guidance on de-escalation, distressed behaviour and behaviour-based risk reduction. They offer practical tools for recognising escalation patterns, maintaining emotional safety, and responding calmly to unpredictable or high-intensity situations.

Title (Linked)	Brief Description	Format	Audience
CPI – Top 10 De-escalation Tips	Clear, accessible de-escalation techniques widely used in health, care, and support settings. Strong for volunteers needing simple, actionable tools.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff
CareLearning – De-escalation Techniques	Practical guidance on calming distressed behaviour, maintaining safety, and using trauma-aware communication.	Training	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
HOPE not hate – Hostile Situations (require free sign up)	Tools for managing hostility, intimidation, and emotionally charged interactions in public-facing environments.	Toolkit	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
HSE – Violence & Aggression at Work	Authoritative UK guidance on preventing violence and aggression in public-facing roles. Essential for volunteers and staff encountering unpredictable behaviour.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
NHS –Managing Conflict (AQuA PDF)	Evidence-informed guidance on conflict triggers, emotional regulation and safe intervention in health and social-care environments.	PDF	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
D-Hub – Hostility & Authoritarian Behaviour	Guidance on recognising authoritarian behaviours, harmful narratives, and escalation patterns.	Toolkit	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

4. Boundary Setting & Expectations

Clear, respectful boundaries can help volunteers and staff maintain safety, emotional regulation and role clarity when supporting service users.
Boundaries protect both parties, reduce escalation, prevent role drift, and support trauma-aware communication - especially in environments where service users may be distressed, frustrated or seeking support beyond the organisation's remit.

Effective boundary-setting can help organisations to:

- maintain safe, predictable, and respectful interactions.
- protect volunteers and staff from emotional overload, manipulation, or unsafe expectations.
- clarify what support can and cannot be offered.
- reduce conflict and escalation linked to unmet or unclear expectations.
- uphold trauma-aware communication and emotional-safety principles.
- strengthen role clarity across Scotland's third sector.
- support volunteers and staff in navigating difficult or sensitive conversations.

Boundary-setting is not about saying "no" - it is about helping to **create clarity, safety and predictability for everyone involved**.

4.1 Top Tips for Staff and Volunteers

The following tips provide practical, trauma-aware actions volunteers and staff can use to set clear, respectful, and predictable boundaries with service users. They are designed as quick, easy-to-apply prompts that help steady interactions, reduce confusion, and maintain emotional safety when expectations are unclear, pressure is rising or conversations begin to drift beyond the organisation's role.

These prompts act as rapid reference points that volunteers and staff can draw on before beginning a sensitive interaction, during moments where limits need to be reinforced, or afterwards to reflect and strengthen future practice. They emphasise clarity, consistency, calm pacing, emotionally safe language, role limits and offering safe alternatives - the core components of effective boundary setting in psychologically informed practice.

- **Be clear and respectful.** Boundaries should be firm while maintaining dignity and respect.
- **Use simple language.** "Here's what I can do, and here's what I can't do."
- **Explain the reason.** People accept boundaries more easily when they understand why.
- **Stay consistent.** Changing boundaries increases confusion and tension.
- **Avoid over-promising.** Volunteers should only offer what the organisation can deliver.
- **Use "I" statements.** "I'm not able to do that, but I can help with…"
- **Protect emotional safety.** Boundaries should reduce shame, not increase it.

- **Notice manipulation cues.** Guilt-tripping, pressure, or testing boundaries should trigger escalation.
- **End with options.** Offer safe alternatives or next steps where possible.
- **Review regularly.** Volunteers and staff should reflect on boundaries after difficult interactions.

By using these tips, volunteers and staff can maintain predictable communication, reduce defensiveness, protect their own wellbeing, and support service users in ways that are safe, respectful, and aligned with organisational values. They help create steady, regulated interactions across Scotland's third sector, particularly in public-facing or high-pressure environments where boundary clarity is essential for safety and trust.

4.2 Core Set

The following core set of resources offer accessible, evidence-informed guidance on boundary setting, role clarity, and emotionally safe communication. They provide Scotland-specific tools, structured exercises and easy-to-apply frameworks that support safe, predictable interactions.

Title (Linked)	Brief Description	Format	Audience
MIND – Top Tips or setting and maintaining boundaries	Accessible guidance on setting healthy boundaries, maintaining emotional safety, and protecting wellbeing during challenging interactions.	PDF	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Scouts UK – Prepare for the Conversation	Practical guidance for volunteers and staff on preparing for sensitive conversations, including tone, clarity, and boundary setting.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff
SCCR – Emotional Regulation & Boundaries	Tools for emotional regulation, calm communication and boundary setting during difficult conversations. Strong Scotland-specific resource.	Toolkit	Managers
Indeed – 16 ways to set boundaries at work	*Guide / Practical Boundary-Setting Tips* Straightforward, accessible strategies for setting and maintaining healthy boundaries in workplace and volunteer settings.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
BPS – Constructive Conversations	Strategies for navigating difficult topics, maintaining psychological safety, and setting boundaries without escalating tension.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
CLD Standards Council – Competent Practitioner Framework.	Scotland-specific professional standards that support volunteers and staff to understand limits, responsibilities, and safe boundaries in community-based work.	Framework	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

5. Trauma-Aware Communication

Trauma-aware communication can help volunteers and staff interact safely, respectfully, and compassionately with service users who may be affected by trauma, distress, fear, shame, or emotional dysregulation. Trauma-aware practice can help reduce escalation, promote emotional safety and support more regulated, grounded interactions especially in public facing or support focused environments.

Effective trauma-aware communication can support organisations to:

- recognise trauma responses such as withdrawal, agitation, or emotional overload.
- use language that can help reduce shame, fear, and defensiveness.
- maintain calm, predictable, and emotionally safe interactions.
- support emotional regulation through tone, pacing, and grounding.
- avoid re-traumatisation through confrontation or unsafe questioning.
- support trauma-informed practice in line with recognised Scottish and UK guidance.
- strengthen trust and psychological safety across services.

Trauma-aware communication is not about providing therapy - it is about helping to **create safety, reducing harm, and support regulated, respectful interactions**.

5.1 Top Tips for Staff and Volunteers

The following tips provide clear, trauma-aware actions volunteers and staff can use to support emotionally safe, regulated, and respectful communication with trauma-affected service users. They are designed as quick, easy-to-apply prompts that help steady interactions, reduce emotional overload, and maintain calm, predictable dialogue when people may be feeling distressed, overwhelmed, or fearful.

These prompts act as rapid reference points that volunteers and staff can draw on before beginning a sensitive conversation, during moments where emotions rise or regulation dips, or afterwards to reflect and strengthen future practice. They emphasise slow pacing, grounding techniques, predictable communication, non-judgemental language, and safe, consistent boundaries - the foundations of trauma-aware practice that help people feel heard, respected, and emotionally protected.

- **Slow everything down.** When people are distressed, they may find it harder to take in information - gentle pacing helps.
- **Use grounding language.** “You are safe here. We can take this one step at a time.”

- **Avoid sudden movements or changes.** Predictability reduces fear and hypervigilance.
- **Acknowledge feelings without probing.** “It makes sense that this feels difficult.”
- **Offer choices.** Offering choices can help people feel more in control.
- **Use non-judgemental tone.** A calm, non-judgemental approach can help reduce distress.
- **Avoid confrontation.** Trauma can amplify defensiveness and fear.
- **Protect boundaries.** Trauma-aware does not mean absorbing unsafe behaviour.
- **Check your own regulation.** Staff or volunteers who are feeling overwhelmed may find it harder to respond effectively.
- **End with clarity.** Trauma-affected people need predictable next steps.

By using these tips, volunteers and staff can reduce shame and defensiveness, support emotional regulation, avoid re-traumatisation, and maintain safe, compassionate interactions across Scotland’s third sector. They help create steady, respectful communication in public-facing or high-pressure environments where trauma responses may appear suddenly or subtly.

5.2 Core Set

The following core set of resources provide Scotland-specific, UK-wide, and international guidance on trauma-aware communication, emotional regulation, and psychologically safe interaction. They offer practical tools, language guidance and structured frameworks that help volunteers and staff reduce harm and support regulated, compassionate engagement.

Title (Linked)	Brief Description	Format	Audience
NES – Trauma-Informed Practice (NTTP)	The national Scottish framework for trauma-informed practice. Essential for grounding communication in Scotland-specific standards.	Webpage	Staff, Managers, Trustees
Mental Health Foundation – Understanding Trauma	Accessible guidance on what trauma is, how it affects behaviour and how to communicate safely with trauma-affected individuals.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Samaritans – Supporting People in Distress	Practical tools for supporting people experiencing acute distress, emotional overwhelm or suicidal ideation.	PDF	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

SCCR – Emotional Regulation Tools	Tools for emotional regulation, calm communication, and trauma-aware dialogue.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Violence Reduction Alliance – Trauma-Aware Language Guide	Clear guidance on safe, non-triggering language that reduces shame, fear, and escalation.	PDF	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Trauma Informed Oregon – Micro Lessons	Bite-sized lessons on trauma-aware communication, grounding, emotional safety, and practical interaction skills.	Training	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
UK Government – Working Definition of Trauma-Informed Practice	Provides a UK-wide definition and principles for trauma-informed practice, supporting governance-level alignment.	Webpage	Managers, Trustees, Policy Leads

Knowledge Gateway

This resource was created in partnership with:

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The Knowledge Gateway is created and led by **Volunteer Scotland**

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This is a regularly reviewed resource. If you have any suggested updates, please email Volunteer Scotland at **hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk**