Knowledge Gateway

Practice Guidance and Information

Expert Led Safety Advice

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

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Introduction

This guidance document provides volunteers, voluntary-sector staff and managers with evidence-informed, practical safety techniques drawn from specialist organisations, Scotland-specific bodies and national authorities. It supports safe, confident decision-making across public-facing roles, outreach, events, lone working, digital engagement and situations involving hostility or escalation - the environments where volunteers and staff most often need calm, proportionate and psychologically informed responses.

Each topic includes two types of support: short **Top Tips** that offer quick, easy-to-use prompts, and a more detailed **Core Set** that provides fuller guidance, structured tools and practical resources drawn from Scotland-specific and UK-wide organisations.

The **Top Tips** are designed as rapid reference points volunteers and staff can use before entering a situation, during moments of uncertainty or escalation, or afterwards to reflect and strengthen future practice. They provide immediate, behaviour-aware actions that help steady communication, reduce risk and maintain emotional and physical safety.

The Core Set offers deeper learning for training, supervision, planning or more complex situations involving hostility, distress or environmental risk. **It includes** structured models, scenario-based techniques and Scotland-specific guidance that support safe, confident and regulated decision-making.

Safety guidance is organised into **five core skills** that volunteers and staff rely on in unpredictable or higher-risk environments:

- **Situational Awareness** – noticing early behavioural cues, changes in the environment, and emerging hostility.
- **Personal Safety in Public Spaces** – staying safe while lone working, travelling, or supporting people in open or unfamiliar environments.
- **De-escalation Techniques** – reducing emotional intensity, preventing escalation and maintaining psychological safety.
- **Online Safety / Digital Security** – protecting personal information, recognising scams, and responding safely to digital hostility.
- **Managing Confrontation / Hostile Behaviour** – recognising hostility early, maintaining boundaries, and following safe response pathways.

These topics include practical examples - such as identifying higher-risk situations (crowds, conflict, distress), spotting environmental risks (layout, exits, isolation), recognising hostility linked to misinformation, rumours or harmful narratives, and following safe escalation pathways (who to contact, when to step back, when to seek support).

Together, these subtopics bring together practical, evidence-informed guidance on:

- practical, scenario-based techniques
- behaviour-focused safety skills
- Scotland-specific community safety context
- national safety standards and legal expectations
- trauma-aware and anti-oppressive approaches
- awareness of narrative-based hostility

This creates a **robust, clear foundation** for volunteer and staff safety across Scotland's third sector to support calm, regulated and informed responses in both everyday interactions and higher risk 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 work safely, calmly and confidently in situations involving uncertainty, distress, hostility or increased risk.

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, systematic process to identify, assess, and categorise guidance for staff, volunteers and organisations dealing with 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 relevant evidence-informed 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 of 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.

Acknowledgements

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. Situational Awareness

Situational awareness is the foundation of personal safety in any public-facing role. Volunteers and voluntary sector staff often work in open, unpredictable environments - community centres, streets, events, doorsteps and other public spaces - where risks can emerge quickly and without warning. In hostile or higher risk contexts, situational awareness enables volunteers and staff to:

- recognise early behavioural cues of distress, agitation or aggression
- spot environmental risks such as poor lighting, enclosed spaces, groups gathering or blocked exits
- identify hostility driven by harmful stories or rumours - for example, hostile messaging, misinformation, rumours, or tension linked to identity (e.g. race, religion, gender, nationality)
- make safer decisions before a situation escalates
- maintain emotional regulation under pressure

1.1. Top Tips for Staff & Volunteers

These practical tips show how situational awareness works in practice - helping volunteers and staff stay observant, regulate emotion and make safer decisions in public-facing environments. They are designed as quick, easy-to-apply prompts that support calm, grounded and proportionate responses when situations feel uncertain, busy, unpredictable or potentially hostile.

The following tips offer clear, trauma-aware actions volunteers and staff can use to stay safe, steady and observant in public-facing roles. They act as rapid reference points that can be used before entering a space, during moments where behaviour or atmosphere begins to shift, or afterwards to reflect and strengthen future practice.

They emphasise noticing behaviour, scanning the environment and maintaining emotional regulation - the core components of effective situational awareness. By using these prompts, volunteers and staff can recognise early warning signs, make safer positioning choices, reduce escalation and maintain calm, confident decision-making across Scotland's third sector. They help create steady, informed and safety-focused interactions in both everyday environments and higher-risk situations.

- **Scan the environment before engaging.** Notice lighting, exits, groups gathering, blind corners and anything that feels "off". Trust your instincts - they are often your first warning sign.

- **Watch for changes in behaviour.** Raised voice, pacing, clenched fists, rapid speech or fixed staring can indicate rising agitation. Early recognition can help to prevent escalation.
- **Position yourself safely**. Keep a clear exit route, avoid being boxed in and maintain comfortable distance. Small adjustments in positioning can significantly reduce risk.
- **Slow your pace**. Tense situations often escalate because the pace of speech is too fast. Slowing your speech and movements helps regulate both you and the other person.
- **Notice signs of misinformation, rumours or identity-based hostility**. References to conspiracy theories, hateful messaging, misinformation or identity-based hostility can signal deeper tension. Stay calm, avoid debate and prioritise safety.
- **Stay grounded in your role**. Volunteers are not expected to "fix" complex situations. Your role is to stay safe, stay calm and follow organisational procedures.
- **Use your team.** If something feels uncomfortable, check in with a colleague, adjust your position so you're not isolated, or ask for support. Situational awareness is stronger when shared.
- **Withdraw early if needed**. Leaving a situation before it escalates is safe practice. If your body signals discomfort, step back and reassess.
- **Document concerns**. If you notice repeated patterns - such as specific locations, individuals, behaviours or early signs of hostility - record them using your organisation's reporting process. Shared information strengthens team awareness and supports safer decision-making.

1.2. Core Set

The following core set of resources provide evidence-informed guidance on situational awareness, personal safety and early-warning risk indicators. Each resource offers practical, evidence-informed tools volunteers and staff can apply directly in public-facing environments.

Title (Linked)	Brief Description	Format	Audience
Suzy Lamplugh Trust – Personal Safety: Out and About	Practical personal safety guidance covering awareness, positioning, safe travel and early warning cues. Strong on behaviour-focused techniques volunteers and staff can use on the streets, in public spaces and outreach settings.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

Peoplesafe – Personal Safety Tips & Advice	Clear, scenario-based advice on recognising risk, responding to agitation and staying safe while lone working. Includes behavioural cues and practical positioning strategies relevant to public-facing roles.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff
Scottish Communities Scotland– Community Safety Guidance	Scotland-specific community safety context, including local risk factors, community tensions and practical advice for volunteers working in neighbourhoods, public spaces and community settings.	Toolkit / Web Resource	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
HOPE not hate – Safety & Security Advice	Hostility-focused guidance covering far-right narratives, identity-based hostility, misinformation and situational risk indicators. Strong on recognising narrative-based tension and staying safe in politically charged environments.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
GOV.UK – Leading for Safety: Situational Awareness	National safety standards outlining how to observe, interpret and act on environmental and behavioural cues. Provides a structured model for maintaining awareness and making safer decisions under pressure.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Hope & Courage Collective – Something to Fight For	Narrative-based situational awareness guidance explaining how harmful narratives, misinformation and identity-based hostility influence behaviour. Helps volunteers and staff recognise deeper tension patterns and respond safely.	Webpage / Narrative Toolkit	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
EIS – Fighting the Influence of the Far-Right	Scotland-specific briefing on far-right narratives, recruitment tactics and early warning signs. Useful for volunteers and staff encountering misinformation, polarisation or identity-based hostility in community settings.	PDF Briefing	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

2. Personal Safety in Public Spaces

Volunteers and voluntary sector staff frequently work in public spaces where control is limited - streets, parks, transport hubs, doorsteps, rural areas, and community outreach locations. These environments can involve unpredictable behaviour, lone-working risks, identity-based hostility, harassment, or night-time safety challenges.

Personal safety skills help staff and volunteers:

- plan safe routes and exits
- manage lone-working risks
- respond appropriately to harassment or hate incidents
- maintain professional boundaries in public settings
- understand statutory expectations around safety and reporting

These skills are essential for anyone delivering support in open, public-facing or higher risk environments.

2.1. Top Tips for Staff & Volunteers

The following tips provide clear, practical actions volunteers and staff can use to stay safe, confident and aware in public spaces. They are designed as quick, easy-to-apply prompts that help people plan ahead, position themselves safely and make calm, proportionate decisions when working in open, unpredictable or unfamiliar environments.

These prompts act as rapid reference points that volunteers and staff can draw on before entering a public space, during moments where behaviour or atmosphere begins to shift, or afterwards to reflect and strengthen future practice. They emphasise planning, safe positioning, boundary clarity and early-warning cues - the core components of personal safety in open environments where control is limited and risks can emerge quickly.

By using these tips, volunteers and staff can maintain situational awareness, reduce exposure to risk, recognise early signs of agitation or hostility and protect their own wellbeing while supporting service users. They help create steady, confident and safety-focused interactions across Scotland's third sector, particularly in outreach, street-based work, events and other public-facing settings.

- **Plan ahead.** Know where you're going, how long you'll be there, and how you'll leave. Share your plan with a colleague when lone working.
- **Assess the space.** Look for lighting, visibility, escape routes, groups gathering, and areas that feel isolated or unsafe.

- **Stay visible.** Position yourself where others can see you. Avoid enclosed or hidden areas when meeting service users.
- **Keep belongings secure.** Carry minimal valuables, keep bags zipped, and avoid displaying expensive items.
- **Use confident body language.** Stand tall, keep your shoulders relaxed, and maintain steady eye contact without staring.
- **Trust your instincts.** If something feels wrong - a person, a location, a situation - step back and reassess.
- **Avoid confrontation.** If someone becomes hostile, prioritise distance and safety rather than engagement.
- **Know your boundaries.** Volunteers are not required to enter unsafe spaces or remain in situations that feel threatening.
- **Report concerns early.** Share any incidents, patterns or unsafe locations with your team so risks can be managed collectively.

2.2. Core Set

The following core set of resources provide evidence-informed guidance on personal safety, lone working and public-space risk awareness. Each resource offers practical, evidence-informed tools volunteers and staff can apply directly in public-facing environments.

Title (Linked)	Brief Description	Format	Audience
Suzy Lamplugh Trust – Personal Safety at Work	Comprehensive guidance on staying safe in public-facing roles, including travel safety, lone working, risk assessment and early warning cues. Strong on practical, behaviour-focused techniques.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
National Youth Agency – Public Spaces & Outreach Work	Detailed outreach safety guidance covering planning, risk assessment, lone working, safeguarding and managing unpredictable public environments. Useful for volunteers and staff delivering street-based or mobile support.	PDF Guidance	Volunteers, Staff
Peoplesafe – The Safety of Public Facing Lone Workers	Clear visual guidance on lone-working risks, personal safety strategies and behavioural cues. Strong on practical tips for volunteers and staff working alone in public spaces.	Infographic / Web Resource	Volunteers, Staff

HSE – Volunteer Health and Safety	Statutory expectations for volunteer safety, including risk assessment, duty of care and legal responsibilities. Provides a national standard for organisations supporting volunteers and staff in public settings.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Report It – Personal Safety Tips	Practical advice on staying safe in public spaces, including harassment response, hate-incident reporting and situational awareness. Useful for volunteers and staff encountering unpredictable behaviour.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff
Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian – Volunteer Health & Safety Guide	Scotland-specific guidance on volunteer and staff safety, including lone working, public-facing risks and organisational responsibilities. Strong local relevance.	PDF / Web Resource	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Hope & Courage Collective – How to build an inclusive narrative	Narrative-based guidance explaining how harmful narratives and identity-based hostility shape public interactions. Helps volunteers and staff recognise deeper tension patterns and respond safely.	PDF Toolkit	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

3. De-escalation Techniques

Volunteers and voluntary sector staff regularly support people who may be distressed or overwhelmed. De-escalation techniques help you reduce emotional intensity, maintain psychological safety and prevent situations from escalating. These skills are vital across Scotland's third sector, particularly in public-facing and higher-risk environments.

They help volunteers and staff to:

- slow the pace of interaction
- reduce emotional arousal
- respond without escalating tension
- maintain boundaries under pressure
- recognise when to withdraw safely

3.1. Top Tips for Staff & Volunteers

The following tips provide clear, trauma-aware actions volunteers and staff can use to calm situations, reduce emotional intensity and maintain safety. They are designed as quick, easy-to-apply prompts that help people regulate their own responses, communicate steadily and make proportionate decisions when behaviour becomes unpredictable, distressed or agitated.

These prompts act as rapid reference points that volunteers and staff can draw on before approaching a distressed individual, during moments where tension begins to rise, or afterwards to reflect and strengthen future practice. They emphasise communication style, pacing, safe positioning and emotional regulation - the core components of effective de-escalation in public-facing or higher-pressure environments.

By using these tips, volunteers and staff can slow interactions down, reduce escalation risk, maintain psychological safety and protect their own wellbeing while supporting service users. They help create calmer, more regulated and safety-focused conversations across Scotland's third sector, particularly in outreach, events, community settings and other environments where distress or hostility can emerge quickly.

- **Lower your voice and slow your pace.** Calm, steady communication helps regulate the other person's emotional state and signals safety.
- **Use short, simple sentences.** Over-explaining can increase frustration; clarity reduces cognitive load for someone in distress.
- **Acknowledge feelings without agreeing with behaviour.** "I can hear this is really stressful" validates emotion while maintaining boundaries.

- **Avoid sudden movements.** Keep your posture open, relaxed and predictable to reduce perceived threat.
- **Offer choices.** Small, safe options ("Would you prefer to sit or stand?") help restore a sense of control.
- **Don't match intensity.** If someone becomes louder or faster, you become quieter and slower.
- **Create space.** Physical distance reduces pressure and helps de-escalate agitation.
- **Know when to step back.** If behaviour escalates beyond safe limits, withdraw and follow organisational procedures.
- **Reflect key points.** "Let me check I've understood…" helps reduce misunderstanding and tension.

These techniques support both **frontline volunteers** and **staff managing complex interactions**, ensuring safer, calmer and more regulated conversations.

3.2. Core Set

The following core set of resources provide evidence-informed guidance on de-escalation, emotional regulation and managing distressed behaviour. Each resource offers practical, evidence-informed tools volunteers and staff can apply directly in public-facing environments.

Title (Linked)	Brief Description	Format	Audience
CareLearning – De-escalation Techniques	Practical guidance on de-escalation in health and social care settings, including behaviour-focused strategies, communication techniques and early warning signs. Strong on real-world examples relevant to both staff and volunteers.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Crisis Prevention Institute – Top 10 De-escalation Tips	Clear, accessible tips for reducing agitation and preventing escalation. Focuses on communication style, emotional regulation and safe positioning - highly relevant for public-facing roles.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff
HSE – Violence & Aggression at Work	National guidance on recognising, preventing and responding to aggressive behaviour. Provides statutory expectations, risk-assessment principles and organisational responsibilities for	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

	staff and volunteer-involving services.		
D-Hub – Anti-Authoritarian Toolkit	Guidance on managing authoritarian behaviour, hostility driven by harmful stories or rumours, and politically charged tension. Useful for volunteers and staff encountering misinformation, polarisation or identity-based hostility.	Toolkit / Web Resource	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

4. Online Safety / Digital Security

Volunteers and voluntary sector staff increasingly work in digital and hybrid environments, where hostility, misinformation, scams and targeted harassment can occur. Online risks can be anonymous, persistent and emotionally harmful - and digital hostility can spill over into real-world interactions.

Online safety and digital security help volunteers and staff:

- protect personal information
- recognise scams, impersonation and phishing attempts
- respond safely to online hostility or harassment
- manage identity-based or narrative-driven digital threats
- maintain organisational and service-user confidentiality
- reduce the risk of digital harm escalating into in-person risk

These skills are essential for anyone communicating online, managing social media, responding to public enquiries, or supporting service users digitally.

4.1. Top Tips for Staff & Volunteers

The following tips provide clear, practical actions volunteers and staff can use to stay safe, confident and protected online. They are designed as quick, easy-to-apply prompts that help people respond calmly to digital hostility, protect their personal information and make safer decisions when communicating in public-facing or hybrid environments.

These prompts act as rapid reference points that volunteers and staff can draw on before posting, when receiving unexpected or hostile messages, or during moments where online interactions begin to feel overwhelming or unsafe. They prioritise safe responses to digital hostility - where emotional impact and escalation risk are highest - followed by core cyber-security practices that reduce wider organisational and personal risk.

By using these tips, volunteers and staff can maintain emotional regulation, reduce exposure to digital harm, recognise early signs of impersonation or hostility, and protect both themselves and their organisation’s digital safety. They help create steady, respectful and safety-focused online interactions across Scotland’s third sector, particularly in public-facing roles, community engagement, outreach and digital support settings.

Hostility & Online Behaviour

- **Avoid engaging with hostile comments.** Do not debate, correct or respond to online hostility - escalate through organisational channels.
- **Pause before posting.** Consider whether content could be misinterpreted, misused or targeted by hostile actors.
- **Know when to step back.** If online hostility becomes overwhelming, disengage and escalate to staff or organisational leads.
- **Report scams, suspicious activity or hostile patterns.** Share concerns with your team early - patterns help identify wider risks.

Cyber Security & Privacy

- **Protect your personal information.** Avoid sharing personal phone numbers, addresses or private social-media accounts with service users or the public.
- **Use strong, unique passwords.** Follow organisational guidance and enable multi-factor authentication wherever possible.
- **Be cautious with links and attachments.** If a message feels unusual, unexpected or urgent, treat it as suspicious until verified.
- **Separate personal and volunteer accounts.** Use organisational email or volunteer-specific accounts for public-facing communication.
- **Check privacy settings regularly.** Ensure your personal accounts are locked down and not publicly searchable.
- **Be cautious when using AI tools.** Always follow your organisation's policies and guidance on the use of AI. Do not enter personal details, sensitive information or service-user content into AI platforms unless their use has been explicitly approved.

These practices protect both **individual volunteers/staff** and the **organisation's digital safety**.

4.2. Core Set

The following core set of resources provide evidence-informed guidance on digital hostility, online safety and cyber resilience. They prioritise tools that help volunteers and staff recognise hostile online behaviour - including baiting, pile-ons, misinformation and identity-based targeting - followed by essential cyber-security practices for Scotland's third sector.

Digital Hostility, Online Behaviour & Trauma-Aware Communication

Title (Linked)	Brief Description	Format	Audience
Healing Justice London – Communications as a Site of Transformation	Trauma-aware digital communication guidance exploring how online interactions can support safety, dignity and emotional wellbeing. Useful for volunteers and staff responding to distress or hostility online.	PDF Toolkit	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Police Scotland – Cybercrime & Online Safety	Official guidance on online harassment, digital threats, fraud and reporting pathways. Supports volunteers and staff dealing with hostile comments, targeted behaviour or suspicious online activity.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Trading Standards Scotland – Latest Scams	Up-to-date information on scams circulating in Scotland. Helps volunteers and staff recognise emerging digital threats, misinformation patterns and manipulative online tactics.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff

Cyber Resilience, Privacy & Organisational Safety

Title (Linked)	Brief Description	Format	Audience
Lead Scotland – Accessible Online Safety Resources	Clear, accessible online safety guidance designed for diverse users. Covers safe browsing, privacy settings, scams and digital confidence - ideal for people needing simple, inclusive advice.	Webpage / Accessible Toolkit	Volunteers, Staff
NCSC – Cyber Aware Actions	National cyber-security standards including password safety, device protection, multi-factor authentication and scam awareness. Strong on practical steps staff and volunteers can implement immediately.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

CyberScotland – Cyber Resilience Resources	Scotland-specific cyber-resilience guidance for organisations and individuals. Covers digital risk management, cyber hygiene, incident response and resilience planning.	Web Resource Hub	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
SCVO – Cyber Resilience for Charities	Practical guidance for third-sector organisations on cyber resilience, data protection, digital risk and organisational responsibilities. Highly relevant for staff managing volunteer-involving services.	Webpage / Toolkit	Staff, Managers, Trustees

5. Managing Confrontation and Hostile Behaviour

Volunteers and voluntary sector staff sometimes encounter situations involving confrontation, aggression or hostility linked to someone's identity (such as race, religion, gender or nationality). These moments can arise suddenly - during outreach, events, public-facing roles, digital engagement or service delivery - and can be emotionally charged or high-risk.
Managing confrontation safely is not about 'winning' an argument. It is about:

- protecting yourself and others
- reducing escalation
- recognising hostility early
- maintaining trauma-aware and anti-oppressive practice
- knowing when to withdraw
- following clear organisational pathways

These skills are essential across Scotland's third sector, where volunteers and staff may face distress, frustration, misinformation, political hostility or hate-motivated behaviour.

5.1. Top Tips for Staff & Volunteers

The following tips provide clear, trauma-aware actions volunteers and staff can use to stay safe, regulated and confident when facing confrontation or hostility. They are designed as quick, easy-to-apply prompts that help people recognise early warning signs, maintain steady communication and make proportionate decisions when behaviour becomes aggressive, unpredictable or identity-based.

These prompts act as rapid reference points that volunteers and staff can draw on before entering a potentially tense interaction, during moments where hostility begins to rise, or afterwards to reflect and strengthen future practice. They emphasise pacing, boundaries, safe positioning and early-warning cues - the core components of safe confrontation management in public-facing or higher-risk environments.

By using these tips, volunteers and staff can reduce escalation risk, maintain psychological and physical safety, protect their own wellbeing and follow clear organisational pathways when hostility becomes targeted or identity-based. They help create calmer, more regulated and safety-focused interactions across Scotland's third sector, particularly in outreach, events, community settings and other environments where confrontation can emerge quickly.

- **Stay calm and steady.** Your tone, pace and posture influence the direction of the interaction.
- **Keep physical distance.** Space reduces pressure and helps prevent escalation.

- **Avoid arguing or debating.** Confrontation often worsens when people try to "correct" misinformation or challenge hostile views directly.
- **Acknowledge emotion, not hostility.** "I can see this situation is really upsetting" validates feelings without engaging with harmful behaviour.
- **Set clear boundaries.** "I want to help, but I need us to keep this conversation respectful."
- **Use simple, neutral language.** Avoid sarcasm, complex explanations or emotionally loaded phrases.
- **Know your exit routes.** If behaviour escalates, step back and prioritise safety.
- **Follow hate-crime reporting routes.** If hostility targets someone's identity (such as race, religion, gender or nationality), report it through Police Scotland or your organisation's procedures.
- **Document incidents.** Patterns help organisations improve safety planning and support volunteers.

These techniques support both **frontline volunteers** and **staff managing complex or higher risk interactions**.

5.2. Core Set

The following core set of resources provide evidence-informed guidance on managing confrontation, hostility and identity-based aggression. Each resource offers practical, evidence-informed tools volunteers and staff can apply directly in public-facing environments.

Title (Linked)	Brief Description	Format	Audience
Charity Commission – Responding to the Hostile Environment	Guidance for charities on navigating politically charged or hostile public environments. Covers organisational responsibilities, escalation pathways and safeguarding considerations.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers, Trustees
Peoplesafe – How to Diffuse Aggression	Behaviour-focused advice on recognising early signs of aggression, reducing tension and protecting personal safety. Useful for volunteers and staff in public-facing roles.	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff
Police Scotland – Hate Crime	Official guidance on recognising, reporting and responding to hate crime. Essential for volunteers and staff encountering hostility based on identity (race, religion, gender, nationality or other protected characteristics).	Webpage	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

Scottish Government / COSLA – Hate Crime Toolkit	Scotland-specific toolkit providing practical steps, definitions, reporting pathways and organisational responsibilities for managing hate incidents and supporting affected individuals.	Toolkit / Web Resource	Volunteers, Staff, Managers
Hope & Courage Collective – Narrative Harm & Hostility	Narrative-based guidance explaining how harmful stories, misinformation and polarisation fuel hostility. Helps volunteers and staff recognise early signs of rising tension and respond safely.	Webpage / Toolkit	Volunteers, Staff, Managers

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**