Knowledge Gateway

Practice Guidance and Information

Where Do I Start?

A Quick Guide to Finding the Right Resources

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

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Where Do I Start?
A Quick Guide to Finding the Right Support

This framework brings together practical guidance to help volunteers, staff and organisations respond safely, confidently, and compassionately when facing challenging situations.

You do not need to read every document from beginning to end. Use this guide to find the section most relevant to the situation you are dealing with today.

If you need help with…	Start here	Key topics
Concerns about personal safety while volunteering or working in public	Expert-led Safety Advice	Situational Awareness; Personal Safety in Public Spaces; De-escalation Techniques
Someone behaving aggressively, confrontationally or in a threatening way	Dialogue & Conflict with Service Users	Conflict Management with Service Users; Managing Aggressive or Distressed Behaviour; Boundary-Setting & Expectations
Online threats, harassment, or hostile messages	Expert-led Safety Advice and Specialist Communications Guidance	Online Safety / Digital Security; Managing Confrontation / Hostile Behaviour; Responding to Social Media Hostility
Supporting someone who is distressed, overwhelmed, or affected by trauma	Trauma-Informed Support and Dialogue & Conflict with Service Users	Trauma-Informed Practice; Debriefing Models; Trauma-Aware Communication
Volunteer or staff wellbeing concerns	Trauma-Informed Support	Professional / Clinical Supervision; Volunteer Wellbeing Support; Burnout Prevention
Burnout, emotional exhaustion, or compassion fatigue	Trauma-Informed Support	Burnout Prevention; Volunteer Wellbeing Support
Disagreements or tensions within a team	Internal Conversations & Team Wellbeing	Managing Differing Viewpoints & Internal Tensions; Conflict Resolution Within Teams
Creating a more supportive and inclusive team culture	Internal Conversations & Team Wellbeing	Psychological Safety & Team Wellbeing; Anti-Racism / Inclusion Conversations

Facilitating a difficult conversation with a volunteer or colleague	Internal Conversations & Team Wellbeing	Facilitating Sensitive Conversations; Conflict Resolution Within Teams
Misinformation, rumours, or false information spreading online or in the community	Specialist Communications Guidance	Countering False Narratives / Misinformation
Hostile comments on social media	Specialist Communications Guidance	Responding to Social Media Hostility
A journalist or media outlet has contacted your organisation	Specialist Communications Guidance	Managing Press Enquiries
A crisis, incident, or reputational concern	Specialist Communications Guidance	Crisis Communications; Protecting Organisational Reputation
Planning a public-facing activity or event	Risk Assessments & Safety Planning	Risk Assessment Frameworks; Safety Planning for Public-Facing Activities
Concerns about lone working	Risk Assessments & Safety Planning	Lone Working & Deployment Safety
Working in areas of heightened tension or hostility	Risk Assessments & Safety Planning	Working in Areas of Community Tension; Incident Reporting & Escalation
A volunteer or staff member has experienced a hostile incident	Risk Assessments & Safety Planning and Trauma-Informed Support	Incident Reporting & Escalation; Debriefing Models; Volunteer Wellbeing Support

Quick Principles for Any Situation

Whatever challenge you are facing, the following principles apply across the framework.

Keep People Safe

- Prioritise physical and emotional safety.
- Follow organisational procedures.
- Escalate concerns early.
- Do not place yourself or others at unnecessary risk.

Stay Calm

- Slow the pace.
- Communicate clearly and respectfully.
- Focus on facts, behaviours, and impacts.
- Avoid escalating conflict.

Use Support

- Seek advice early.
- Use supervision, debriefing and wellbeing support where available.
- Share concerns through appropriate organisational channels.
- Remember that demanding situations do not need to be managed alone.

Maintain Boundaries

- Stay within your role and responsibilities.
- Follow agreed escalation processes.
- Know when to step back and seek additional support.
- Protect your own wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of others.

Framework Overview

The framework is organised into six broad themes. Each theme contains a set of practical topics that can be used independently or alongside other sections of the framework.

Expert-led Safety Advice

Supporting volunteers and staff to stay physically safe and confident when working in public-facing or higher-risk environments.

- Situational Awareness.
- Personal Safety in Public Spaces
- De-escalation Techniques
- Online Safety / Digital Security
- Managing Aggressive or Distressed Behaviour

Trauma-Informed Support

Providing trauma-informed approaches that help volunteers and staff work safely, compassionately, and sustainably.

- Trauma-Informed Practice
- Professional / Clinical Supervision
- Debriefing Models
- Volunteer Wellbeing Support
- Burnout Prevention

Internal Conversations & Team Wellbeing

Helping teams communicate effectively, manage tensions, and create psychologically safe and inclusive environments.

- Facilitating Sensitive Conversations
- Managing Differing Viewpoints & Internal Tensions
- Conflict Resolution Within Teams
- Psychological Safety & Team Wellbeing
- Anti-Racism / Inclusion Conversations

Risk Assessments & Safety Planning

Supporting organisations to anticipate, manage and respond to operational risks.

- Risk Assessment Frameworks
- Safety Planning for Public-Facing Activities
- Lone Working & Deployment Safety
- Working in Areas of Community Tension
- Incident Reporting & Escalation

Specialist Communications Guidance

Helping organisations respond confidently to misinformation, media attention, and reputational risks.

- Countering False Narratives / Misinformation
- Crisis Communications
- Managing Press Enquiries
- Responding to Social Media Hostility
- Protecting Organisational Reputation

Dialogue & Conflict with Service Users

Supporting volunteers and staff to navigate challenging conversations and interactions with service users safely and constructively.

- Dialogue Skills / Constructive Conversations
- Conflict Management with Service Users
- Managing Aggressive or Distressed Behaviour
- Boundary-Setting & Expectations
- Trauma-Aware Communication

Not Sure Where Your Issue Fits?

Many situations overlap several areas of the framework.

For example:

- A hostile social media post may involve **Digital Safety**, **Social Media Hostility**, **Volunteer Wellbeing**, and **Organisational Reputation**.
- A distressed service user may involve **Trauma-Informed Practice**, **Trauma-Aware Communication**, and **Debriefing Models**.
- A disagreement between volunteers may involve **Sensitive Conversations**, **Conflict Resolution**, and **Psychological Safety**.
- A challenging public-facing event may involve **Risk Assessment**, **Safety Planning**, **De-escalation**, and **Crisis Communications**.

If in doubt, start with the area that most closely matches your immediate concern and follow the related signposts to other sections as needed.

Remember: this framework is designed to complement, not replace, your organisation's existing policies, procedures, safeguarding arrangements, and reporting processes. Always follow local guidance and escalation procedures where these are in place.

Knowledge Gateway

This resource was created in partnership with:

Volunteer Scotland

SCVO

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**