

Unacceptable Client and Service User Behaviour Policy

Equal Lives is committed to providing a quality service to all our clients and service users. In return, we expect everyone who encounters our staff, volunteers, partners, and other service users to treat them with respect as detailed in our Customer Charter.

Most of our clients and service users tell us that they are satisfied with our services, but we recognise that sometimes this is not always the case.

We understand that, in times of trouble or distress, people may act out of character, and, in a very small number of cases, may behave in an unacceptable way despite our best efforts to help.

This makes it difficult for us to deal with queries or complaints effectively. We also have a duty to protect the welfare and safety of our staff, volunteers, partners, and other service users. They should be able to come to Equal Lives without fear of violence, abuse, harassment, or discrimination.

Purpose of this Policy

This policy means we can manage unacceptable client and service user behaviour consistently and fairly. It sets out clearly what we consider to be unacceptable, in line with our Customer Charter, and the steps we may take to deal with such behaviour. It applies to everyone who accesses our services to help us protect our staff and volunteers from abuse and harm.

Principles

You can expect that our staff and volunteers will always:

- Treat all clients and service users with respect and dignity.
- Maintain our professional boundaries.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Deal with a query or case in a professional, efficient, and inclusive way.

We expect people accessing our services to:

- Treat us with courtesy and respect, avoiding unacceptable and aggressive behaviour.
- Give us the information and documents we need to help you.

- Help us by giving your views and suggestions and letting us know when we have either failed to meet or have exceeded your expectations.

Safeguarding and Disclosures

If, in the course of our work, an individual threatens to harm themselves or others, we will consider disclosing this to a relevant health professional. We may also contact the Police.

Definition of Unacceptable Behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour means acting in a way that is unreasonable, regardless of the level of someone's stress, frustration, or anger. It may involve acts, words, or physical gestures that could cause another person distress or discomfort.

Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour

This is behaviour or language (written or spoken) that could cause our staff, volunteers, partners or other service users to feel afraid, threatened, or abused. This includes threatening emails, telephone calls, meetings, and comments on social media or elsewhere.

For example:

- Insulting or degrading language, including inappropriate banter, innuendo, or malicious allegations.
- Any form of physical violence or threats of physical violence.
- Derogatory racist, sexist, ageist, or homophobic remarks.
- Comments relating to disability, perceived gender, religion, belief, or any other personal characteristic.

Unreasonable Demands and Vexatious Complaints

Clients and service users might make requests that we cannot reasonably accommodate. This may include but is not limited to:

- The amount of information they seek.
- The nature and scale of service they expect.
- The volume of correspondence they generate.
- A remedy or outcome that cannot be achieved.

We accept that someone who is persistent is not necessarily guilty of unacceptable behaviour. What is seen as an unreasonable demand will depend on the circumstances of each case. We will always consider each situation on its own merits.

Examples of behaviour which we consider as unreasonable demands and vexatious complaints include but are not limited to:

- Refusing to follow our complaints procedure.
- Persistently pursuing a complaint where the complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted.
- Contacting us repeatedly and frequently without giving us enough time to respond to previous correspondence.
- Insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff when a suitable alternative has been offered.
- Visiting our offices without an appointment.
- Focusing disproportionately on a matter in relation to its significance and continuing to focus on this point despite receiving proportionate responses addressing the matter.
- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach: pursuing parallel complaints about the same issue with different members of staff or volunteers.
- Threatening or using actual physical violence towards staff, volunteers, partners, and other service users.
- Being personally abusive or verbally aggressive towards staff or volunteers dealing with their issue.
- Recording meetings or conversations (whether face-to-face or on the telephone) without the prior knowledge or consent of other people involved.

How We Will Respond to Incidents of Unacceptable Behaviour

We do not expect our staff and volunteers to tolerate unacceptable behaviour when communicating with our clients and service users. When this happens, they have the right to cease communications, or, when face to face, ask the individual to leave Equal Lives premises.

Before taking such action, we will always warn clients and service users that they are behaving in an unacceptable way to give them the chance to change

their behaviour. However, a warning will not be given in extreme cases to protect our staff, volunteers, partners, and other service users, for example, when a physical threat is made.

Where these circumstances arise, we may take the following steps:

- Ask the individual to modify their behaviour and explain why.
- If the behaviour continues to be unacceptable, our staff or volunteer may remove themselves, and any other people at risk, from the situation. If the communication is by telephone, the caller will be told that the call will be ended.
- The staff member or volunteer will inform their manager. In all cases a manager will investigate the situation and decide what action to take. This could include limiting an individual's contact with us.
- Refer the matter to the Police where a criminal offence has been threatened or committed and refer to a relevant safeguarding or health professional if an individual threatens to harm themselves or others.
- The staff member or volunteer (in conjunction with their manager) will record the incident on Charity Log within the 'Risk & Visit Information' section on the client's record, where there is an 'Incident Reporting' button introduced in February 2025. Any previous incidents recorded since its introduction will be visible here.

Restrictions

If clients or service users continue to behave unacceptably, a manager can put in place a temporary or permanent service use restriction. If we decide to do this, we will tell the individual what we are doing, setting out:

- Why we consider their behaviour unacceptable.
- What action we are taking and if there is a time limit on the restrictions.

If we decide to limit service use, we will make a note of the limitation in our records.

We reserve the right to:

- Permanently or temporarily suspend or ban someone from accessing services.
- Limit contact to set times on set days.

- Restrict contact to a nominated employee who will deal with all future calls or correspondence or interaction.
- Restrict the issues on which we will correspond.
- Block emails or telephone numbers if the number and length of communications sent is excessive.
- Remove the service user from Equal Lives social media and/or block them from our accounts.
- Refuse to consider a complaint or any further contact in exceptional circumstances.
- Take any other action which we consider necessary or appropriate to make this policy effective.

Review

We will regularly review any decision to restrict service use and when appropriate we may lift some or all restrictions.