

Appendix 13: Personal Safety Precautions for Pastoral Carers

1. **If possible, avoid meeting alone with the abuser.** Choose the safest possible location to talk. Meet in a populated area with clear exit routes. You do not want you or the other person to be or to feel trapped, so easy access to exits, open doors, and windows are recommended. If you are going to confront the abuser, take someone with you.
2. **Pay close attention to body language.** Use observational data to recognize the signs of escalation including the person's posture, eye contact, facial expressions, physical gestures, muscle tone, voice and speech patterns etc.
3. **Identify the person's immediate goal.** Ask "I can tell you are really upset today. What can I do for you right now to help you feel calmer/safer?" Or "I'm worried about you, and I want to make sure that you and everyone else is safe right now. Can you tell me what's going on please?" Try to uncover what the real, underlying issue may be for this person today that has led them to be so activated.
4. **Express a desire to help without making promises you can't keep.** "I appreciate you coming in today. I'd like to help you if I can."
5. **Choose your words carefully.** If the abuser is in a state of agitation avoid questions, statements, or information that blame him/her for the problem. While this conversation will need to happen, that moment may not be the right time. The person needs to "save face" and feel in control right now.
6. **Set firm limits in a compassionate, respectful manner.** Use specific behavioural language. "In order for me to be more able to help you today, I'm going to ask you to please lower your voice, stand back a bit from me, and take a few deep breaths."
7. **Use assertive language.** If verbal redirections do not succeed, then move to limit-setting in a firm but flexible manner, offering choices when possible. "I still want to help you and I also need to keep everyone here feeling safe. I need you to either take a cool-down break right now or for you to leave and come back at another time. Which option do you prefer?" "I'm going to step out of the room for a moment and get some water. May I bring you some?" "We are unable to give you or any cash. Is there some other way I can help you today?"
8. **Use your own body language to diffuse the situation.** Examples include staying relaxed and empathic, keeping a reasonable distance, keeping yourself a bit lower than the client, hands down and palm out, a sideways stance, relaxed breathing, meeting gaze but not staring down, lowered voice and slow speech and friendly, confident tone.
9. **Call for back-up assistance when possible.** This may be anyone to directly assist you or to simply stand back and observe discretely.
10. **Flight is often a better option than fight.** If the abuser is overtly threatening, carrying a weapon of any kind, is assaulting you or damaging property, put as much distance as you can between you and the abuser. Keep your phone close by to call 999 immediately. You may feel confident to defend yourself but avoid a physical confrontation if possible.
11. **Make a record of what has taken place.** If specific threats have been made to yourself or to the abuser's victim, inform the police and the victim.