

Respectful communication policy

Introduction

Hampshire SENDIASS 'What to Expect' document sets out what customers accessing SENDIASS can expect from its staff and what the service expects from its customers.

Hampshire SENDIASS deal with a large number of telephone calls and emails. Often customers have cause to contact the service repeatedly and this is expected. However occasionally, staff have to deal with unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious customers.

Raising legitimate queries or criticisms of the service should not in itself lead to someone being regarded as unreasonably persistent or vexatious.

Purpose

Persistent or vexatious customers can take up a lot of staff time and make unreasonable demands on staff which take them away from their normal duties. In addition, customer's communication can be sarcastic, rude or contain derogatory remarks which can sometimes appear threatening to staff. These sorts of problems happen rarely. This policy exists to ensure that all parties understand how the service will deal with contact of this nature. Dealing positively with these issues will help free up staff time to deal with genuine customer enquiries.

Examples of communication that is considered persistent and/or vexatious

This is not an exhaustive list but illustrates some of the main incidents that arise:

- Repeatedly adopting a 'scattergun' approach, e.g.:
 - Pursuing the same issue via multiple routes and not making parties aware that others have been contacted (for instance making the same enquiry via the telephone helpline, the service inbox, and to one or more support workers at the same time).
 - Routinely copying the service or support worker into all emails pertaining to a child even when the emails do not relate to the outcomes for which the service is providing support.
 - Calling the helpline multiple times about the same issue, apparently to check whether different advisors give the same advice.
- Making unnecessarily excessive demands on the time and resources of the service, for example, telephoning or sending emails daily and/ or several times a day, writing lengthy complex emails frequently e.g. every few days.
- Making remarks to employees that could be considered sarcastic, rude, derogatory, discriminatory or threatening.
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- Submitting repeat complaints, essentially about the same issue, after the service’s complaint procedure has been completed.
- Insisting that a service is provided that is not consistent with the ‘What to Expect’ document.
- Repeatedly requesting to change the focus of support work, when the circumstances have not changed.
- Failing to share relevant information.
- Making what appear to be groundless complaints about employees and seeking to have them replaced.
- Electronically recording meetings and conversations without prior knowledge and consent of the other parties involved.

Dealing with unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious communication

It is important to distinguish between people who make regular contact because they have genuine, ongoing or multiple problems and those that are unreasonably persistent or vexatious. Where it is identified that a customer has become or is becoming unreasonable in their contact with the service, the support worker or manager will attempt to deal with the matter by communication with the customer. They will explain the concerns regarding the customer’s communication and suggest a way forward to manage the issue. This may include:

- Requesting a change in communication,
- Designating a single point of contact,
- Agreeing an acceptable frequency for communication,
- Highlighting any communication style deemed inappropriate (e.g. use of threatening, swearing, rude, aggressive language) and requiring the customer to stop using this style,
- Notifying the customer that the service will ignore communication unless it is relevant to an open enquiry
- Notifying the customer that the service will only respond to new issues,
- Other relevant resolutions.

Extreme cases in which resolution has been attempted but the customer’s communication has not changed, may lead to the blocking of telephone calls and electronic contact with the service.

Complaints

Any complaints about the application of this policy will be dealt with in accordance with the service’s complaint policy, available on the website.