

Hanging on the telephone –
managing difficult phone calls

Introductions

- Kate Webster, Independent Mental Health Advocate
- Find a person you don't normally work with and sit together
- Tell the whole group your name, your role and where you work

Exercise 1

- With your partner, discuss what to you is a 'difficult phone call'
- You have 2 minutes each for this
- We will feedback to the group what makes a phone call difficult

What is a difficult phone call?

Examples...

- Not knowing the answer
- Person won't get off the phone
- Person will not listen to your advice
- Person is angry
- Person is abusive
- Risk to the person (suicide, safeguarding issues)
- Risk of getting in wrong
- Crying / high level of distress
- Person rings repeatedly
- Unhelpful professionals

What techniques or strategies do you use for difficult phone calls?

Exercise 2

- Discuss in your pair for 5 minutes
- We will feed back your idea's to the main group

Some strategies and techniques

- Active listening
- Person centred approach
- Empathy
- Calm voice , professional approach
- Honesty
- Assertiveness
- De-escalation technique
- Broken record technique
- Fogging
- Know the policies (e.g, on risk, or repeat callers)
- Offer to ring back when you have more information
- Get support from colleagues
- Debrief afterwards

Broken record

- Calmly repeat the information you are trying to give
- Do not elaborate or get drawn in to other issues
- Once your point has been heard and acknowledged you can move on to explanations, compromises and options
- This is an alternative to becoming either aggressive or passive

De-escalation

for when someone is angry

- Remain in control of yourself. Breathe, relax muscles.
- Speak in a clear, direct manner
- Be respectful at all times
- Do not be defensive
- Don't argue
- Reflect their feelings
- Be non-judgemental
- Answer questions that seek information
- Do not answer abusive questions
- Explain limits and boundaries respectfully and firmly
- Be patient, it takes time for people to calm down

Fogging

Uses words that acknowledge the other person's point of view and accepting that it might under some circumstances be true BUT without necessarily accepting it is true of you.

- Useful when someone is being aggressive and expecting you to disagree with them

E.g. Client says 'I've waited ages, you are useless'

You respond 'You have waited a long time. Let's see if there's anything we can do about that.'

Moving towards ending a call

Example; empathy, broken record

- I've heard what you have said about not having any money to live on so now I'm going to make you an appointment to visit us.
- I can hear that you are really concerned about being advised not to drive. As I have said the service that you need to contact is the DVLA.
- I understand and am sorry that you have waited a long time for our service. We will contact you when you reach the top of the list.

Ending a call

Honesty and assertiveness

- We are going round in circles now, so I'm going to end this call and ring you back next week.
- I am not prepared to listen to you being abusive so I am ending this call. Please ring back when you are able to not be abusive. Goodbye (put phone down immediately).
- As I have said several times I am not willing to listen to you swearing and shouting. I am going to end this call now. Goodbye.
- As I have said I have to leave the office now so I need to end this call now. Goodbye.

What will you take away from this session to apply to your next difficult phone call?

Hand out

- Example of what to do in a crisis flowchart (from Sheffield mental Health Advocacy Service)
- Be clear on the policy of the organisation regarding the difficult calls you get.