

## **United Way of Greater Cleveland 2-1-1**

### **HANDLING CHALLENGING INQUIRERS**

*(Revised February 2025)*

Sometimes, there are very good reasons why some people are ‘difficult’ – either because of a lifetime of experiences that you cannot address or because of a single incredibly frustrating day. Sometimes, there are no good reasons – that’s just how some people are. People who are in a stressful situation are often difficult to deal with because of that situation and may not normally be that way. People who are difficult to serve may need the assistance of an I&R Specialist the most.

#### **TECHNIQUES TO DEFUSE ANGER**

- Remain calm and engage the client.
- Lower your tone of voice and slow the speed of your words.
- Try to demonstrate warmth.
- Remain non-judgmental.
- Define your role as best you can in terms of what you can do and what you can’t do.
- Demonstrate strong active listening skills. If the client shares their name, use it; repeat an important phrase(s) that the client uses.
- Always be polite no matter how rude the other person may be. Words such as “please” and “thank you” can gain you important credibility.
- Respect their point of view. You may disagree but also know that your view may not be right.
- Follow proper hold procedures, being sure to ask for their permission if you need to place them on hold for any reason (i.e., searching in the database, reaching out to the Supervisor, etc.). This makes the person feel important because you have sought their permission. Ensure that you tell them what you are going to do as they will be suspicious.
- Compliment when appropriate.

#### **WHAT NOT TO DO**

- Do not match their emotions.
- Do not try to counter their anger with a long, logical argument – people who have lost their temper are not going to listen.
- Do not offer weak platitudes such as how you are sure things will work out better with time. These are likely to inflame them further.
- Do not get overly defensive. The reason the client is angry is probably not your fault. But the client does not want to hear you say, “Well, that isn’t my fault.”
- Do not respond with your own anger, however unjust the accusations.

## **TELECOMMUNICATIONS HARASSMENT POLICY**

For purposes of 2-1-1, the activities of a caller will be considered harassment if the caller has been told at least once (either in a previous or immediate communication) that the language and/or

content of the call is unacceptable, yet the caller continues the behavior, and the content of the call fits into one or more of the following categories:

- A caller describes sexual activity or suggests, requests or proposes that the caller and the Specialist engage in sexual activity.
- The caller uses obscene language.
- The caller issues general verbal threats suggesting that they intend to do damage to property or people (if the threats are credible and specific, the call needs to be immediately transferred to their local municipal police department).
- The caller is a repeat caller that the agent believes has the intent to harass or abuse.

### **WORKING WITH CALLERS WHO HARASS**

- Be clear, firm, professional and calm. Set boundaries.
- Do not bait the caller or engage in added conversation. Do not threaten the caller.
- Many harassers are trying to engage you. Do not allow yourself to be manipulated.

### **PROTOCOL – SPECIALISTS**

1. Record ALL calls in Navigate. Under Reason for Contact, select “Harassment Call”.
2. Set boundaries. Politely ask the client to stop the inappropriate behavior. Be clear; say what they are doing is inappropriate and unacceptable. Advise the caller if their behavior doesn’t change, you will disconnect the call. See suggested language found at the end of this document.
3. Tell the caller that they should not call again with the same behavior(s) or issue (when appropriate). See suggested language found at the end of this document.
4. Send callers (cold transfer) to the Harassment – Abusive Caller skill found in your InContact Address Book.
5. Report it to a supervisor if this is a repeat caller or you need guidance.

### **PROTOCOL – SUPERVISORS**

1. Ensure that the Specialist has recorded the call in Navigate.
2. Ensure that the Specialist has specifically stated that the language is not acceptable (when appropriate).
3. Ensure that the Specialist has told the caller not to call again (when appropriate).
4. Check with 2-1-1 Supervisor inContact about blocking the call.
5. Check with 2-1-1 Supervisor about filing a police report for “telecommunications harassment.” If the problem is deemed serious enough, it will be assigned to a detective who can trace the call and follow through. It is critical when filing a report that we have told the caller not to call again under the same circumstances.

### **SAMPLE STATEMENTS TO USE WITH CALLERS**

Sample One: Obscene Language

- If you continue to use that type of language, I am required to end this call and report it to my supervisor and the police.
- I am ending this call. Please do not call this line again using that language.

#### Sample Two: Unacceptable Behavior

- If you continue to \_\_\_\_\_, I am required to end this call and report it to my supervisor and the police.
- I am ending this call. Please do not call this line again and do \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Sample Three: Repeat caller, intends to harass

- I have provided all of the information I have available. We have reviewed all options. I cannot continue this call because other people cannot get through on this line.
- I will be happy to help you with another issue. However, if you call again regarding this same issue, it will be considered harassment. I will need to end the call and report it to my supervisor and the police.