

Policy on the Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users

Version Control

Version	Change	Author	Date
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Management of threatening and abusive service users

POLICY

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- (i) assist Crime Victims Helpline provide a safe, secure and positive working environment for staff and volunteers to deliver a quality service to victims of crime, where the mental and emotional impact of delivering the service is contained and effectively managed.
- (ii) document the policy, including sanctions for the management of threatening and abusive service users.
- (iii) define the definition of:
 - a. *threatening language*;
 - b. *abusive behaviours*;
 - c. *service*; and
 - d. *service users*.
- (iv) outline the responsibilities and rights of staff and volunteers when dealing with, and responding to, threatening language and abusive behaviours by service users.
- (v) document the protocols for dealing with, and responding to, threatening and abusive service users.

Background

Crime Victims Helpline Board and Management do not tolerate threatening language or abusive behaviour directed towards our staff and volunteers.

The Crime Victims Helpline (Helpline) offers support to all victims of crime in Ireland by listening, supporting and informing. Our aim is to support, inform and empower victims of crime and all those impacted by crime by giving our service users the time and space to talk about their experience without judgement. The Helpline can also make available information about the criminal justice system and referrals to other resources.

The nature of the CVH service means that some users of the Helpline may be in distress, emotionally-charged or expressing anger and frustration. Staff and volunteers role is to listen and interact to the person as they are, in the manner that they choose to express themselves.

Notwithstanding this, Crime Victims Helpline has a responsibility to protect staff and volunteers with a safe, secure and positive working environment. This includes proactive management of emotional and mental health of staff and volunteer arising from threatening language and abusive behaviour by service users.

Policy

This policy aims to protect and support staff and volunteers who may be subject to threatening language and abusive behaviours by service users that may give rise to emotional distress, anguish and fear, as well as may cause adverse mental health impact.

It is not the intention for this policy to be used to unjustly restrict or withhold the services of the Crime Victims Helpline from service users experiencing trauma or distress which may have impaired their approach and interaction with Crime Victims Helpline staff or volunteers.

The policy and supporting protocols are premised on mutual respect and understanding by both Crime Victims Helpline staff, volunteers and service users. It is also premised on acknowledging reasonable and just behaviour does not include threatening language and abuse.

Statement

Crime Victims Helpline Board and Management do not tolerate threatening language or abusive behaviour directed towards our staff and volunteers.

As such, the Board and Management are committed to mitigating and minimising the risks, and therefore the potential impact of such behaviour, on our staff and volunteers.

We seek to do this within the context of providing a supportive service to all reasonable people seeking to legitimately and respectfully access the Crime Victims Helpline.

Application

This policy, including protocols, applies to all staff and volunteers of Crime Victims Helpline providing the listening and support service.

The policy applies to services users of Crime Victims Helpline.

The policy and protocols apply to the telephone service, text message and email service provided by the Crime Victims Helpline.

Provisions

Process

Where a staff member or volunteer is subject to threatening language and/or abusive behaviour, they must:

Firmly, calmly, respectfully and clearly inform the service user:

1. That the language being used is considered threatening or the behaviour considered abusive and this is not acceptable.
2. The Crime Victims Helpline Board and Management do not accept such threats or behaviours directed at its staff or volunteers.
3. Unless the threats and/or behaviour ceases, the service may be terminated which means the further assistance will not be able to be provided.
4. That a record will be logged reflecting the threatening language and/or abusive behaviour, including that the policy was implemented.
5. The policy regarding abusive contacts (ie: *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users* - this document) is available on request.
6. State the application of a sanction (as applicable)
7. The call, text or email exchange is terminated (when applicable).

Where a sanction is imposed, a clearly identifiable note is to be entered into the service users record of contact of each sanction. This should include the date, circumstances leading to the sanction, statement of application of the policy by the staff member or volunteer.

The Executive Director is to be notified of the threatening language or abusive behaviour as soon as is practical after the event, including the identity of the service user (if known) and the sanction imposed.

A debrief is to be provided to the affected staff member or volunteer as soon as is practical after notification of the threatening language or abusive behaviour event. If requested, additional support may be provided.

Sanctions

Where a staff member or volunteer is subject to threatening language and/or abusive behaviour the following sanctions will apply:

- first incident – a formal warning;
- second incident – a formal warning; and
- third incident – withdrawal of access to the Crime Victims Helpline service for six (6) months.

In the event a service user:

- makes an explicit and tangible threat of violence or crime against a staff member and/or volunteer or
- attempts to continually access the service following withdrawal of access;

then – at the discretion of the Executive Director – the service user may be reported to the Garda.

Timeframe

There is no time frame wherein the breaches occurs for the application of the sanctions provided for in this policy.

Review

This policy will be reviewed twelve (12) months after initial approval. Subsequent reviews and updates will be due at least every three (3) years.

Appeals

Service users who are sanctioned under this policy will be able to lodge an appeal against a sanction.

Complaints and appeals must be in writing and submitted to the Chair of the Board of the Crime Victims Helpline (or his/her delegate). Complaints and appeals must be lodged within three (3) months of the sanction being imposed.

An independent review and assessment of the appeal is to be undertaken by an external person. Such a review will have access to all relevant people involved and to records relevant to the complaint or appeal held by the Crime Victims Helpline or the service user.

The review should be completed with the findings and recommendations communicated to the service user and Crime Victims Helpline within one (1) month.

Definition

‘threatening language’ refers to words that reflects a serious intention to instill fear in another person or the intent to cause physical or mental harm that could lead to psychological or physical harm of another person.

'abusive behaviour' is a general term for various behaviours which may be aggressive, coercive or controlling, destructive, harassing, intimidating, isolating, or threatening, that a person may use to intimidate another.

'service' refers to the Crime Victims Helpline and all the means used to engage and interact with our target group, including telephone, email and text messaging **'service user'** refers to a victim of crime, their family member or friend who makes contact with the Crime Victims Helpline.

Responsibilities and rights of staff and volunteers

When dealing and interacting with service users, staff and volunteers are required to be:

- respectful;
- warm;
- empathetic;
- understanding;
- accepting
- compassionate; and
- sensitive.

Similarly, staff and volunteers have the right to be treated by service users with respect and regard. Staff and volunteers also have the right to a safe, secure and positive working environment where their mental and physical health is supported and protected by the organisation. The *Policy on the Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users* is a part of the Crime Victims Helpline's commitment to providing a safe, secure and positive environment for our staff and volunteers.

Management of threatening and abusive service users

PROTOCOLS

Protocols

Following are the protocols staff and volunteers are to follow should they be subject to threatening language or abuse behaviour by a service user.

When the service user isn't known to Crime Victims Helpline

On receipt of a phone call, text or email message where the service user uses threatening language or exhibits abusive behaviour towards a staff member or volunteer:

Firmly, calmly, respectfully and clearly inform the service user:

8. That you find the language being used threatening or the behaviour abusive and this is not acceptable.
9. The Crime Victims Helpline Board and Management do not accept such threats or behaviours directed at its staff or volunteers.
10. Unless the threats and/or behaviour ceases, the call or text/email exchange may be terminated which means the further assistance will not be able to be provided.
11. That a record of the call, text or email will be logged reflecting the threatening language and/or abusive behaviour, including that the policy was implemented.
12. The policy regarding abusive contacts (ie: *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users* - this document) is available on request.
13. The call, text or email exchange is terminated (when applicable).

If a service user contacts Crime Victims Helpline again and can be identified the protocol ***When the service user is known to Crime Victims Helpline*** will apply. In applying the protocol, it should be on the premise no previous warnings have been given.

Management of threatening and abusive service users

PROTOCOLS

When the service user is known to Crime Victims Helpline

First abusive incident

On receipt of a phone call, text or email message where the service user uses threatening language or exhibits abusive behaviour towards a staff member or volunteer:

Firmly, calmly, respectfully and clearly inform the service user:

1. That you find the language being used threatening or the behaviour abusive and this is not acceptable.
2. The Crime Victims Helpline Board and Management does not accept such threats or behaviours directed at its staff or volunteers.
3. Unless the threats and/or behaviour ceases, you will issue a first warning under the Crime Victims Helpline's *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users*.
4. The policy provides for warnings to be issued and the phone call, text or email exchange to be terminated meaning assistance may not be able to be provided.

In the event, the threatening language or abusive behaviour continues:

5. Issue the service user a warning, in line with the *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users*.
6. Inform the service user, the policy (ie: *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users* - this document) is available on request.
7. Terminate the call, text or email exchange.
8. Clearly mark the issuance of a first warning under the *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service User* on the user's report form.

Second incident

On receipt of a second phone call, text or email message where the service user uses threatening language or exhibits abusive behaviour towards a staff member or volunteer:

Firmly, calmly, respectfully and clearly inform the service user:

1. That you find the language being used threatening or the behaviour abusive and this is not acceptable.
2. The Crime Victims Helpline Board and Management does not accept such threats or behaviours directed at its staff or volunteers.
3. Their record states that they have been previously warned about threatening language and abusive behaviour towards staff and volunteers.
4. Unless the threats and/or behaviour ceases, you will issue a second warning under the Crime Victims Helpline's *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users*.
5. The policy provides for warnings to be issued and the phone call, text or email exchange to be terminated meaning assistance may not be able to be provided.

In the event, the threatening language or abusive behaviour continues:

9. Issue the service user with a second warning, in line with the *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users*.

10. Inform the service user, the policy (ie: *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users* - this document) is available on request.
11. State a under the policy, a third incident of threatening language or abusive behaviour by them means they will not be able to use the Crime Victims Helpline service.
12. Terminate the call, text or email exchange.
13. Clearly mark the issuance of a second warning under the *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service User* on the user's report form.

Third incident

On receipt of a third phone call, text or email message where the service user uses threatening language or exhibits abusive behaviour towards a staff member or volunteer:

Firmly, calmly, respectfully and clearly inform the service user:

6. That you find the language being used threatening or the behaviour abusive and this is not acceptable.
7. The Crime Victims Helpline Board and Management does not accept such threats or behaviours directed at its staff or volunteers.
8. Their record states that they have previously received two warnings about threatening language and abusive behaviour towards staff and volunteers.
9. There is a policy of issuing two warnings before the service is withdrawn
10. Unless the threats and/or behaviour ceases, you will withdraw the service for six (6) in line with the Crime Victims Helpline's *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users*.

In the event, the threatening language or abusive behaviour continues:

14. Inform the service user that access to the service has been withdrawn for six (6) months, effective immediately.
15. Terminate the call, text or email exchange.
16. Clearly mark the withdrawal of service for six (6) months under the *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users* on the user's report form.

Subsequent contact within the six (6) month period

On receipt of a phone call, text or email message from a service user who has been informed of a six (6) month withdrawal of service:

The staff member or volunteer will:

1. Inform the service user that their access to the Crime Victims Helpline was withdrawn for six (6) months in line with the *Policy on Management of Threatening and Abusive Service Users* effective from <date>.
2. If appropriate, and at their discretion, inform the service user if they are in urgent need of support, that they may wish to contact a helpline such as the Samaritans 116 123 or their GP.
3. Terminate the service.