

Customer aggression and unreasonable customer conduct (CS) 277-09110000

Background

This document outlines information on managing challenging customer behaviour. Links on this page may be unavailable to external audiences.

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[Authorisations and delegations](#)

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Customer aggression and unreasonable customer conduct

Staff regularly encounter challenging behaviour during customer interactions. A customer's behaviour may be affected by emotions as a result of a relationship breakdown, or aggravated by factors such as family violence, legal disputes, financial pressures, illness or addiction. Consideration must also be given to the needs and interests of two or more customers whose relationship may involve conflict. However, it is important to clearly inform customers if their behaviour is unacceptable.

Where unreasonable behaviour continues despite efforts to remedy the customer's concerns, the department may restrict the service arrangements offered to that customer. See [Restricted service customer options \(CS\)](#) . The service restriction can modify or limit the ways the customer can contact the department.

Safety is a key consideration. Manage threats, aggression or assault in accordance with [Security incident reporting](#) . This includes Police referral where appropriate.

Authorisations and delegations

For more information about authorisations and delegations see [Child Support Services, Delegations and Authorisations](#) .

Related links

[Complaints handling \(CS\)](#)

[Personalised Services \(CS\)](#)

[Restricted service customer options \(CS\)](#)

[Customer Management Approach \(CMA\) for Child Support](#)

[Online access to Child Support](#)

[Documenting Child Support information in Cuba](#)

[Contact with Child Support customers](#)

[Service referrals for Child Support customers](#)

Process

This page contains information about managing customer aggression and unreasonable customer conduct. Some links on this page are unavailable to external audiences.

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Customer aggression

Managing customer aggression

This table provides information on how to identify and manage customer aggression.

Item	Description
1	<p>Examples of customer aggression + Read more ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • threats, intimidation, angry behaviour or violence • verbal abuse or offensive language, comments or gestures • damage to assets or property • stalking or harassment <p>Note : for a more detailed description of customer aggression, see the Customer aggression guidelines .</p>
2	<p>Responding to customer aggression over the telephone + Read more ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • try to calm the customer • inform the customer you would like to help them but their behaviour is becoming a barrier to that • warn the customer of your intention to end the call if the behaviour continues. Note: staff must not remove their headset prior to ending a phone call, see Contact with Child Support customers Terminating phone calls • if the abuse continues end the call, document the contact and determine whether to record a Customer Aggression record in ESS. Note: Do not end the call if the customer makes a threat that must be responded to such as threatening to harm themselves or others, a bomb threat, etc. See Security incident reporting . • discuss with your Team Leader (TL) options for managing future contact with the customer. See Customer referral guidelines for Child support staff • if the customer asks to speak to your supervisor, escalate the call to a TL
3	<p>Responding to customer aggression during face-to-face contact + Read more ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • try to calm the customer • inform the customer you cannot help them while they are (name the behaviour) and if the behaviour continues you will end the interview and ask them to leave. See the Public Order (Protection of Persons and Property) Act 1971 (PoPPA)) • if the customer continues the behaviour, seek assistance from a TL or senior officer (use the duress alarm if necessary)

- if there is a risk of physical aggression, call the Police immediately. If possible maintain a physical barrier or increase the distance between yourself and the customer. Don't turn your back on the customer. Remove yourself from the situation if necessary
- other staff should take steps to protect or reassure other customers, e.g. by asking them to move away or leave the office

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Ending customer contact (telephone or face to face) + [Read more ...](#)

Attempt to calm the customer and deal with the specific service issues. Explain that the department does not tolerate unacceptable behaviour.

Staff must not remove their headset prior to ending a phone call. See [Contact with Child Support customers - Terminating phone calls](#) .

It may be appropriate to end customer contact when:

- all information has been provided and further contact will be of no benefit
- the customer is becoming threatening
- the customer persists with offensive language or behaviour after a warning
- the customer appears to be incoherent or intoxicated. Be mindful that some medical conditions can make a person appear to be affected by alcohol or drugs

Note : do not end the call if the customer makes a threat that must be responded to such as threatening to harm themselves or others, a bomb threat, etc. See [Security incident reporting](#) .

Following an incident of customer aggression the staff member must record the incident in ESS. If necessary, a TL should consult with the HR team immediately about support for the staff member.

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Escalation + [Read more ...](#)

If the customer refuses to modify their behaviour, escalate to a TL. The TL should refer the customer to Personalised Services if they cannot resolve the issue as a Step 2 complaint and the customer meets the guidelines in [Customer referral guidelines for Child support staff](#) . Warm transferring the customer to the Customer Review Gateway may also be an appropriate option if you have been unable to resolve their issues and they meet the guidelines in the Customer referral guidelines for Child support staff.

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Security incidents + [Read more ...](#)

Customer aggression may develop into a security incident. This usually involves a threat (overt or implied) of self harm or of harm to another person or an asset, which is confirmed or not withdrawn when challenged by staff. See [Security incident reporting](#) for more information.

Note: the CSO **must** complete a [Security Incident Report Form](#) , even if the threat was withdrawn. In the [Client Profile](#) window, add a special contact (type - 'Other') in Cuba and. In the **Special Contact Detail** field, type 'Security Incident Report - XX/XX/XXXX'.

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PoPPA - Public Order (Protection of Persons and Property) Act 1971 + [Read more ...](#)

If a customer refuses to leave departmental premises, an employee who is authorised under the Public Order (Protection of Persons and Property) Act 1971 can request the customer leave under the provisions of that act. In directing the customer to leave the premises, warn the customer that failure to comply may result in a conviction under the Public Order (Protection of Persons and Property) Act 1971.

Authorised persons for the purposes of s12(2)(c) in DHS include:

- Secretary
- an SES employee
- an EL1 or EL2
- Agency Security Advisor, Assistant Agency Security Advisor or Regional Security Adviser
- an APS employee in the Department who is classified as an APS4 or higher level and whose duties include face to face contact with the public or who is employed in a processing or call centre (this includes, but is not limited to, Social Workers and other professionals)
- Senior Place Representative
- an APS employee in the Department who is classified as an APS5 or higher level at all Department sites or offices
- Executive Manager, General Manager, Area Manager, Customer Service officer, Centre Technician, Audiologist and Audiometrists in Australian Hearing, and
- an APS employee in the office of the Minister for Human Services
- a Constable or a Protective Service Officer is also an authorised person

Note : PoPPA should only be used in situations when customers and staff are not at risk of harm. If there is an immediate threat, call the police immediately.

The authorised person should state:

'I am an authorised person for the purposes of paragraph 12(2)(c) of the Public Order (Protection of Persons and Property) Act 1971, and I am directing you to leave by virtue of the powers conferred under that Act. You will be liable to prosecution if you do not comply with this direction.'

Section 12 of this Act creates an offence punishable by a fine if a person refuses without reasonable excuse, to leave Commonwealth premises on being directed to do so by a person authorised to give directions for the purposes of section 12 of the Act. Paragraph 12(2)(b) of that Act provides that a person may be punished for behaving in an offensive or disorderly manner on Commonwealth premises.

Unreasonable conduct

Identifying and managing unreasonable conduct

This table provides information on how to identify and manage customer unreasonable conduct.

Item	Description
1	<p>Unreasonable conduct description + Read more ...</p> <p>Unreasonable conduct goes beyond the usual behaviours customers display when they have a grievance or a dispute. It exceeds what a reasonable person would consider acceptable in the circumstances.</p> <p>Conduct is unreasonable if it raises substantial health, safety, resourcing or equity issues for the department, other customers or members of the public. It can range from being unnecessarily persistent to aggressive or abusive behaviour.</p>

	<p>Unreasonable conduct hinders the department's ability to manage the customer's child support case and may obscure genuine issues.</p>
2	<p>Considerations when deciding if a customer's conduct is unreasonable ± Read more ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there an obvious error? The customer may be understandably upset if Child Support has made errors or mishandled the customer's case and may need to vent their anger. However, this does not mean a CSO is expected to tolerate abuse or physical aggression • Does the customer respond to attempts to manage their behaviour and address their concerns? • Does the customer have educational, health related, intellectual, language, or other barriers that reduce their capacity to deal with the department
3	<p>Types of unreasonable conduct ± Read more ...</p> <p>Unreasonable conduct can be grouped into five categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unreasonable persistence • Unreasonable demands • Unreasonable lack of co-operation • Unreasonable arguments • Unreasonable behaviour <p>Note: a single instance of these behaviours may not necessarily indicate unreasonable conduct. Often it is a repetition of these behaviours that make them unreasonable. Documentation of every incident is important to establish repetition. See Documenting Child Support information in Cuba .</p>
4	<p>Unreasonable persistence ± Read more ...</p> <p>Examples of unreasonable persistence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • persisting with, or reframing a complaint that has already been addressed • sending large amounts of irrelevant or unnecessary written material including emails • making persistent, repeated phone calls <p>Strategies for dealing with unreasonable persistence</p> <p>Strategies for dealing with unreasonable persistence are about saying 'no'. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure the customer understands what Child Support can and cannot do • define key issues and keep the focus on them • communicate clearly and firmly when the customer is not going to get what they want • maintain a consistent approach (individually and throughout Child Support) • do not allow complainants to reframe the complaint to re-enter the process unless they raise relevant new issues • end telephone calls or interviews if they become unproductive • accurately document all communication with the customer as it occurs • referral to Customer Review Gateway or Personalised Services. See Customer referral guidelines for Child support staff

Consequences of unreasonable persistence

- take no further action on a Step 3 complaint about that specific issue
- notify the customer in writing that Child Support will not communicate further with them or take further action on that issue unless new information becomes available that warrants further action. This action must be approved by a Business Manager in Customer Review and Quality Improvement (CRQI) or the Escalated Issue Management Team
- send a letter warning the customer Child Support will impose a restricted service arrangement if the inappropriate conduct continues. **Note:** this can only occur when the customer is managed in Personalised Services. See [Restricted service customer options \(CS\)](#)
- impose a restricted service arrangement to limit or modify the customer's contact with Child Support, e.g. limiting contact to defined times or to specific staff members; limiting the duration of calls or face-to-face contact. This decision must be approved by the National Manager of CRQI and the customer must be managed in Personalised Services before a restricted service can be implemented

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Unreasonable demands + [Read more ...](#)

Examples of unreasonable demands

- insisting on unachievable outcomes or timeframes
- demanding processes or decisions that would deny the rights of the other party to the assessment
- seeking to direct or control the way their child support case is managed
- making resource demands that are out of proportion to the seriousness of the issue, to the point that other customers are disadvantaged

Strategies for dealing with unreasonable demands

Strategies for dealing with unreasonable demands are about setting limits. They include:

- manage the customer's expectations from the beginning and ensure their expectations are realistic
- ensure the customer understands Child Support decides how their case is managed and the priority and resources that will be dedicated to it
- define key issues and keep the focus on them
- only respond to correspondence that raises a substantive issue related to the customer's child support case
- ending telephone calls that are unproductive. See [Contact with Child Support customers Terminating phone calls](#)
- decline to respond to issues that are not relevant and do not significantly impact on the child support matters at hand
- maintain a consistent approach (individually and throughout Child Support)
- accurately document all communications with the customer
- referral to Customer Review Gateway or Personalised Services. See [Restricted service customer options \(CS\)](#)

Consequences of unreasonable demands

- send a letter warning the customer Child Support will impose a restricted service arrangement if the inappropriate conduct continues. **Note:** this can only occur when the customer is managed in Personalised Services
- impose a restricted service arrangement to limit or modify the customer's contact with Child Support, e.g. limiting contact to defined times or to specific staff members; limiting the duration of calls or face-to-face contact. This decision must

be approved by the National Manager of Quality and Customer Complaints and the customer must be managed in Personalised Services before a restricted service can be implemented

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Unreasonable lack of co-operation [+ Read more ...](#)

Examples of unreasonable lack of co-operation

- presenting a large amount of information which is not organised, sorted or summarised, where the customer is capable of doing this
- displaying unhelpful behaviour - e.g. being dishonest, misquoting others.
- refusing to present all information initially or withholding information in a decision making process and then demanding the decision is set aside
- misrepresenting the facts or providing irrelevant information
- not defining or constantly changing the nature of their complaint or concerns

Strategies for dealing with unreasonable lack of co-operation

Strategies for dealing with unreasonable lack of co-operation are about setting conditions. They include:

- clearly outline what you will and will not consider, what is not relevant, and any issues to which you do not intend to respond
- define key issues and keep the focus on them
- clearly state to the customer what you require them to do
- set reasonable deadlines and state the consequences if the customer doesn't co-operate
- accurately document all contact with the customer
- maintain a consistent approach (individually and throughout Child Support)
- referral to Customer Review Gateway or Personalised Services. See [Restricted service customer options \(CS\)](#)

Consequences of unreasonable lack of co-operation

- complaints will not be pursued until all the information has been presented, or until the customer organises or defines their complaint issues (to the extent the customer is able to do so)
- investigate if the customer is fraudulently misleading Child Support
- send a letter warning the customer Child Support will impose a restricted service arrangement if the inappropriate conduct continues. **Note:** this can only occur when the customer is managed in Personalised Services.
- impose a restricted service arrangement that limits or modifies the contact the customer has with Child Support. This must be approved by the National Manager of Quality and Customer Complaints and the customer must be managed in Personalised Services

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Unreasonable arguments [+ Read more ...](#)

Examples of unreasonable arguments

- interpreting facts in a clearly irrational or unreasonable way and insisting their interpretation is the correct one
- basing arguments on an illogical premise
- insisting on the importance of an issue that is not relevant or doesn't significantly impact on their child support issues

- interpreting the law or policy in a way that contradicts generally accepted views or case law, or insisting that a particular solution is correct in the face of valid contrary arguments or evidence

Note: where unreasonable arguments are combined with a legitimate issue, respond to the legitimate issue but refuse to deal with the unreasonable aspects.

Strategies for managing unreasonable arguments

Strategies for managing unreasonable arguments involve declining or discontinuing the department's involvement. They include:

- clarify what the customer wants and ask if they have supporting evidence
- ensure the customer knows the likely or possible outcomes
- acknowledge the customer's view, but assert Child Support's view
- refer the customer to Objections or the SSAT if appropriate. Do not attempt to debate the merits of the decision, once explained
- avoid being drawn into unproductive arguments or personal attacks
- maintain a consistent approach (individually and throughout Child Support)
- referral to Customer Review Gateway or Personalised Services. See [Restricted service customer options \(CS\)](#)

Consequences of unreasonable arguments

- decline to act on a complaint or to respond to certain issues or to correspondence that has inappropriate or offensive content
- send a letter warning the customer Child Support will impose a restricted service arrangement if the inappropriate conduct continues. **Note** : this can only occur when the customer is managed in Personalised Services
- impose a restricted service arrangement that places limits on issues or the amount or form of contact the customer has with Child Support. This must be approved by the National Manager of Quality and Customer Complaints and the customer managed by Personalised Services

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Unreasonable behaviour [+ Read more ...](#)

Examples of unreasonable

- physical aggression
- written or verbal communication that is offensive, confronting or threatening
- threats of self harm or threats to others

For more information about aggressive behaviour, see [What is Customer Aggression](#) .

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Preventing and managing unreasonable conduct [+ Read more ...](#)

When a customer first displays signs of unreasonable conduct, identify the conduct and ask the customer to modify their behaviour. If the behaviour continues, seek advice and support from a TL and plan how the case should be managed. Follow the plan closely to avoid the customer receiving inconsistent treatment or mixed messages, without being inflexible.

Managing unreasonable conduct

- listen to the customer's concerns without intervening too quickly and attempt to respond to the customer's issues. Acknowledge the customer's feelings or point of view without necessarily agreeing with it
- ask questions to clarify the customer's issues and their desired outcomes

- if the customer is refusing to accept a decision, ask if they disagree with the outcome or want an explanation of why the outcome happened
- if the customer has raised the matter before, assess whether the customer has a genuine grievance. If there is new information or aspects not previously considered they should be investigated
- challenge abusive language – ask the customer to modify their behaviour (state what it is). Explain that the department does not tolerate unacceptable behaviour. Explain you cannot help them if the behaviour continues and you will end the contact (end the call or ask them to leave the premises). Offer the customer a call back or appointment at a time that is suitable to them when they are in a frame of mind to deal with the issues at hand **Note:** staff must not remove their headset prior to ending a phone call, See [Contact with Child Support customers Terminating phone calls](#)
- be professional, respectful and objective. Avoid raising your voice or being drawn into an argument
- focus on the key issues and what you can do to help
- offer to call the customer back after you identify available options
- accept responsibility if there has been an error and offer an apology
- explain what you can or cannot do. Be realistic and follow up on commitments
- if customer contact becomes unproductive but the conduct is not threatening or aggressive, advise the customer that you cannot assist them further and end the call or interview. Where appropriate, arrange a time for further contact. **Note:** staff must not remove their headset prior to ending a phone call, See [Contact with Child Support customers Terminating phone calls](#)
- if the conduct is threatening do not end the call. See [Security incident reporting](#)
- offer appropriate referrals if Child Support is unable to assist (Parent Support Service etc.)
- document the contact and action taken and discuss it with your TL

Procedures when unreasonable conduct continues

Procedures when unreasonable conduct continues

This table provides information on what to do when unreasonable conduct continues.

Item	Description
1	<p>Escalation + Read more ...</p> <p>If the customer refuses to modify their behaviour, escalate to a TL in line with the complaint handling process. See Step 2 complaints – Child Support . The TL should refer the customer to Personalised Services if they cannot resolve the issue as a Step 2 complaint and the customer meets the guidelines in Customer referral guidelines for Child support staff . Warm transferring the customer to the Customer Review Gateway may also be an appropriate option if you have been unable to resolve their issues and they meet these guidelines.</p>
2	<p>Documentation + Read more ...</p> <p>Document and report all instances of unreasonable conduct immediately. See Documenting Child Support information in Cuba . This will support any subsequent decision to impose a service restriction or plan for ongoing management. Focus on specific, actual conduct and do not include opinion or value judgements. When</p>

documenting threats, record the actual words used by the customer where possible. Report customer aggression incidents in [ESS](#) .

3

Referral to Personalised Services + [Read more ...](#)

Personalised Services offers intensive case management to assist Child Support customers with the most complex needs or escalating behaviour. It provides a single point of contact for the customer while their issues are being resolved. See [Customer referral guidelines for Child support staff](#) for more information.

4

Options for restricting customer service (PSO) + [Read more ...](#)

Where a customer continues to display unreasonable conduct consider if restricting the service options available to that customer is appropriate. See [Restricted Service Customer Options \(CS\)](#) for details of the procedure, authorisations and review processes

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Customers with communication or comprehension barriers + [Read more ...](#)

Customers with language barriers, an intellectual disability, a brain injury or mental illness are more likely to have difficulty communicating effectively and may display challenging behaviours. These customers may be less able to comprehend or retain information and may use more persistent questioning or require extra help to understand an explanation or decision. Take this into account in any plan of how to manage the customer's behaviour.

Consider alternative contact arrangements such as:

- via an [authorised representative](#) (for example, an interpreter or disability support worker)
- case management by Personalised Services

The [Customer Risk Identification Model](#) and the [Customer Support Referral Guide](#) can be used to identify the most appropriate type of referral or support service for these customers.

If a special contact arrangement is implemented **with the agreement** of a customer, advise them the arrangement can be revisited if it is restrictive or unhelpful. Distinguish these arrangements from restrictions imposed by Child Support.

6

Written communications containing offensive, threatening or abusive content + [Read more ...](#)

Where a customer sends written communication (including online communication) that is abusive, offensive or threatening and does not raise any substantive or new issues:

- advise the customer the content of the letter is offensive and unacceptable and the Child Support will not respond to any future correspondence containing such content
- with TL approval, record and file any subsequent offensive correspondence but do not acknowledge it or respond to the customer
- report and treat the letter as a security incident where appropriate

Where offensive or threatening written communication also raises a relevant child support issue, act on the specific issue but manage the unreasonable conduct. Treat all threats, including those made by 'write only' customers, in accordance with [Security incident reporting](#) .

When the department may block emails sent directly to an employee's inbox

Customers should not be given a CSO's individual email address. Customers should not send emails to a CSO's individual email address because it is not secure and CSOs' email accounts are not necessarily accessed daily. Direct customers to use CSAonline or other appropriate online services myGov. See [Online access to Child Support](#) . If the customer has obtained a CSO's individual email address, CSP may block the customer's access to the employee's email address.

Resources

This page contains links to resources in relation to identifying and managing customer aggression. Links on this page may be unavailable to external audiences.

On this Page:

[Human Services links](#)

[Fact Sheets](#)

[External websites](#)

Human Services links

[Security incident reporting](#)

[Create a Customer Aggression record](#)

[Our Service Commitments](#)

[Customer Aggression Guidelines](#)

Fact Sheets



[Parent Support Service - Priority Referral Guide](#)



[How to help calm an aggressive customer](#)



[Customer Risk Identification Model](#)

External websites

[Commonwealth Ombudsman - Better practice guide to managing unreasonable complainant conduct](#) .

Training & Support

This page contains training information. Some links on this page are unavailable to external audiences.

Training packages

The following training about this topic is available for staff in ESSentials:

POR00123 - Dealing with Customer Aggression

POR00123a - Customer Aggression Telephony Refresher

A login ID and password may be required.

Note:

- Ensure that line manager's approval has been provided before applying for any training through ESSentials.
- If the links above do not work, go to Learning Portal in ESSentials and search for the relevant course number under **Find a course** .

Update

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Initial Release - Blueprint

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Remove references to attending a Child Support office for face to face contact

Release date: 31 August 2012v1.0

Initial Release