

Date approved by BOD	Date of last review	Date for next review
May 2025	NA	May 2027

Crime Victims Helpline Abusive Service User Policy

The purpose of this policy is to assist in providing 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 effectively managed.

Background

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

The nature of the CVH service means that some users of the Helpline may be in distress, emotionally-charged or expressing anger and frustration. The role of staff and volunteers is to listen and interact with the person 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 the mental and emotional well-being of staff and volunteers arising from threatening language and abusive behaviour by service users.

Definitions

‘Threatening language’ refers to words that reflect a serious intention to instil 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, misconduct of a sexual nature, intimidating, isolating, violent or threatening, that a person may use to intimidate another.

This can take the form of:

- Threats towards staff/volunteers and/or CVH,
- Abusive language directed at staff/volunteers
- Lewd comments or gestures
- Inappropriate conversation of a violent or sexual nature
- Physical violence

- Contact with volunteers or staff outside of official CVH channels (such as on a personal social media account or in-person) that is threatening or abusive
- Repeated unwanted contact with volunteers or staff outside of official CVH channels, regardless of the nature of the contacts.
- Disrupting or limiting access to CVH services through any means.

Protocols

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/behaviour is inappropriate and unacceptable.
2. If it continues the contact with the service user will be ended.
3. If the service user continues with the threatening and/or abusive behaviour, the contact with the service user should be ended.
4. The staff/volunteer should debrief with their line manager.
5. The manager will document the incident in the Abusive Service User log.

In situations where the nature of the interaction does not make it safe for a staff member or volunteer to let the service user know that the language/behaviour is inappropriate and unacceptable, it is appropriate to immediately terminate the contact. Steps 4 and 5 above should then be followed.

Barring from Service

CVH aims to help all victims of crime. However, in situations where a service user repeatedly violates the Abusive Service User Policy, or where the nature of the threatening and/or abusive behaviour poses an elevated risk to staff or volunteers' physical safety or mental wellbeing, the process will be as follows:

The relevant staff member informs the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Depending on the severity of the abuse experienced, options then arise:

1. The CEO consults with the CVH Board Chairperson to decide the length of an appropriate *temporary bar* of an abusive server from using CVH's services for a period of time of between three and six months.
2. The CEO in consultation with the Board Chairperson, brings the situation to the full Board for a decision, to *permanently bar* the abusive service user from accessing CVH services.

In the event that services are withdrawn, either temporarily or permanently, the service user will be notified. If an email address, phone number, or address is known, the service user will be notified in writing. If there is no known contact information, they will be notified upon their next contact with CVH.

Where option one of a temporary ban has been implemented and the service user returns to CVH services and continues to violate the policy as described above, the Board will agree to permanently withdraw services.