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# PPI team guidelines for dealing with distressed members of the public

Sometimes people we work with become upset or distressed, or show signs of illness that give cause for concerns. When these people are volunteers rather than university employees, it can be difficult to know what to do. While recognising that there is rarely a perfect response to difficult situations, we have agreed some rules of thumb to help with decisions should such an occasion occur.

Overall there are two scenarios that inform our guidelines: when people are upset about the way we conducted ourselves or ran a meeting, and when people are showing signs of being unwell and seek help that is best dealt with by a social care or health professional. Sometimes these two things get conflated. A procedure for dealing with complaints is outlined in the ARCNWC Registration pack and can be used for complaints from any member of the public that we work with.

## Preventative measures

ARCNWC staff and Public Advisers should be reminded annually of the Code of Conduct for Advisers which will be reviewed on an annual basis. The PPI team should have completed any relevant University training around diversity, equality and dignity.

Avoid working alone outside of normal working hours and inform colleagues of 1:1 meetings with people we do not already know through ARCNWC or previous involvement activities. Follow the lone working policy of your organisation. See more details at the end of this document.

When inviting members of the public to a meeting or training: consider how to outline the requirements and expectations for participation. This relates to both preparation before the day and conduct at the event. Brief members of the public in advance on what the meeting will focus on and what the requirements on their part will be.

At any event, remind people of the ground rules: confidentiality, respect, focus.

At meetings, pause to consider any emotional impact the discussions might be having on people. If someone seems upset or affected, acknowledge to the group that the topic is emotional. It might be appropriate to round meetings off ‘softly’ by thanking people again for sharing, acknowledging the emotional work we have done and ask people to let us know if they’d like to talk again. This is so that people who have felt ignored or misunderstood, or who haven’t been able to tell their full story, can do so with a team member one-to-one. This is not to provide therapy or professional de-brief.

Raise concerns early; sometimes it might be appropriate to talk to someone because of a small thing, before the problem grows bigger.

Wherever possible, use your office phone for communication, not your personal mobile.

## Response if someone is unwell

First and foremost we are fellow citizens and not health professionals so avoid giving advice to people on what they should do. Signposting to appropriate services is a good response, but avoid giving your own opinion on the services available.

If someone is behaving irrationally emphasise that you cannot help and that they need to see their GP. Do not make yourself available to meet people especially about a service need, as this is not something you are employed or equipped to deal with. If someone persistently rings you, you are not obliged to pick up the phone and it is best not to do so. Inform the PPI team manager as soon as you can.

## Response should someone complain

If someone’s complaint is clearly well-founded speak to another member of staff on how to respond. Consider whether the person’s claim will go beyond the PPI team, in which case you cannot provide an initial response without consulting the PPI lead. Make sure you report the complaint to the whole of the PPI team.

Ensure that you keep an audit trail of all correspondence in regards to the complaint, and ensure you file this in the Public Engagement ‘Complaints’ folder.

If someone is not happy with an apology, or you disagree with someone’s complaint, ask that they put it in writing. This can be by letter or email. Make a note of who made the complaint and how you understood it, and file this in the Public Engagement ‘Complaints’ folder.

Helpful pointers when speaking with an angry or upset person:

1. Recognise the emotional side of PPI and we should behave as good colleagues towards everyone involved in meetings. This includes listening to someone in distress.
2. State that we are not a service and can only provide information about the contact numbers to: adult social care, community mental health team, GP surgeries. Any information provided would have to come with the caveat that we are not trained to provide this, and we recommend they speak to an NHS or social services employee.
3. Repeat that we would like the complaint in writing, try to avoid giving out names but do give them the ARCNWC email or postal address. Follow our complaints procedure as outlined in the ARCNWC Registration pack membership pack.
4. If nobody else is around to give you a de-brief, contact the PPI team manager to arrange this.

Please also refer to Lone and late working policies from Liverpool, UcLAN and Lancaster

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/intranet/safety/guidance/lone-and-late-working/#info>



Liverpool: Inform your supervisor (or another delegated person) of your arrival and departure, provide them with the addresses you are going to, carry a mobile with you and ideally go into someone’s house in pairs.  The off-campus risk assessment form will need to be completed which should include all the lone working controls that are in place.







<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>

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