

Deafblind Scotland vision – “A society in which deafblind people have the permanent support and recognition necessary to be equal citizens”



Deafblind Scotland Policy on Responding to Challenging Behaviour

Challenging Behaviour spans a broad range of behaviours, which “challenge” our perceptions of what constitutes “normal” or “acceptable” social behaviour. Challenging behaviour also presents service providers with a need to respond to the service-user’s right to dignity, privacy and individuality, whilst maintaining a safe environment for the individual and others around them.

It is much more common for deafblind adults to show symptoms of withdrawals, depression, and apathy, behaviours which in themselves challenge us to adopt practices designed to improve the person’s self-esteem and sense of value.

Common communication difficulties

Difficulties understanding what other people are saying:

- Difficulties may be due to hearing loss that has not been detected
- Understanding skills being overestimated
- Difficulties when given too much language to process.
- Difficulties understanding abstract concepts (things that cannot be seen or touched), negatives (e.g. “not”, don’t”) and time concepts (e.g. “yesterday”, “this afternoon”).
- Difficulties understanding sarcasm and taking things literally (e.g. “Oh, that’s great!” when you actually mean the opposite). Understanding this requires attention to tone of voice, facial expression and body language which the person might not understand.

Difficulties in communicating a message to others:

- Difficulties in producing clear speech/signs.
- Lack of words needed to send the message.
- Using the right words but in the wrong order or without the appropriate supporting body language.

What can be done?

- Make sure you are communicating in a way that the person understands. This may include using simple, short sentences and trying to avoid saying something which could be misunderstood.
- Objects, pictures and symbols, sign language and voice output communication aids are all ways of supplementing spoken language.
- Reminding people what will be happening throughout the day is very important.
- Can you teach the person an easier way of communicating their needs?
- Can you teach the person additional vocabulary e.g. teaching the person to ask for a rest.

At the extreme end of the challenging behaviour spectrum involving physical violence, these challenges include:

- Violence towards staff, or members of the public
- Self-injury
- Reckless disregard for personal safety
- Verbal abuse
- Serious damage to possessions or property

Instances of the above are rare amongst deafblind adults living in the community; however, it is recognised that deafblind people may become distressed, self-abusive or even abusive to others.

Services which respect the dignity, privacy and individuality are less likely to induce aggressive responses. Deafblind Scotland and its' Guide/communicators adhere to this ethos by providing communication, information and mobility support in an appropriate manner which supports the deafblind individual in the community. The service-user is both recipient and director of this service.

The role of the Guide/communicator is to mediate for the deafblind person in terms of communication, information and mobility support, similar to the role of an interpreter for a deaf person.

The guide/communicator, while not a carer, has a "duty of care", however, to maintain the basic safety and security of the deafblind person, whilst always maintaining their own safety, as without this they may not be able to take the appropriate steps to maintain the former's safety.

See also The Guide/Communicator's Code of Practice.

Standards

- Deafblind Scotland has a clear policy on the management of violence and on circumstances, which legitimise physical intervention.
- Deafblind Scotland recognises the unique disorder that is deafblindness, and affirms the individuality of deafblind people
- Deafblind Scotland's Guide/communicators will maintain a duty of care towards deafblind people whilst maintaining their own safety at all times
- Guide/communicators intervene to the minimum extent necessary
- Guide/communicators clearly understand the circumstances which would justify the involvement of the police or any other external agency
- Staff are debriefed and supported throughout the incident, where required

- Measures are taken by Guide/communicators to minimise the risk of violence to themselves, the service-user or to others.
- Measures are taken to reduce the likelihood of occurrence of violent behaviour
- Reporting, recording and investigation is prompt, accurate and objective
- Outcomes and findings are studied, and the implications both for the service-user and for Deafblind Scotland practice are acted upon

Dealing with Conflict/Aggression from Deafblind people

Because you are in contact with very vulnerable individuals, there is an occasional risk of coming into contact with aggressive challenging behaviour.

This may be the result of the individual's frustration at any one time, in which we can try to help with re-assurance; more substantively, there may be an underlying mental health issue, which requires appropriate support, and which is out with the role of the Guide/communicator.

In the event of physical aggression on the part of the deafblind person, the role of the Guide/communicator is to anticipate, diffuse, make the person safe, contact their line manager and remove themselves if necessary.

Control Measures – Dealing With Violence

- If a person is known to be violent/aggressive or if it is suspected that violence is likely to occur due to the nature of the appointment, do not visit alone.
- If a person behaves in a manner, which is unacceptable to you, tell them that you find their behaviour offensive and ask them to stop, then warn them that if they continue you will leave.
- Whilst communicating with a deafblind person you may be in close physical contact, even touching. Be aware of this where there is potentially a violent/aggressive situation.
- If the person is agitated when you arrive, telephone the office to inform the line manager. If the person threatens to self-harm, social work or the police should be contacted as soon as possible, the line manager should also be informed. Stay in contact until the situation is resolved.
- Avoid confrontation as far as possible.

- Make sure you are aware of all of the appropriate methods of communication with the client.
- Make sure you are aware of any previous method/s of responding to this behaviour, if it exists. Contact line manager for support/advice.
- Stay calm; try to remain in control of the situation. By staying calm it may have a calming effect on the client who is experiencing difficulties; conversely outwardly panicking can unsettle the alarmed deafblind individual even further.
- Remove any sharp implements, remove any pills you may see lying around, and make sure the front door is open so that arriving support can get access.
- You have a duty to yourself to stay safe in order to protect the deafblind client.
- All incidents like these must be reported,
- In emergencies call the emergency services and inform line manager.

Afterwards

Staff can request support and supervision following any incident to discuss what happened and implications for the future. This will be recorded clearly.

Support will be offered to the service-user after an incident and a review called if required.