

In front-line roles within tourism and hospitality, interacting with customers and delivering exceptional service is central to daily operations. While many interactions are positive, there will inevitably be moments when employees face challenging interactions. These challenges can escalate quickly if not handled effectively, potentially affecting both the physical and psychological well-being of staff.

To ensure your team is prepared, it's critical to have preventative measures in place, including effective communication strategies. Below are key skills and techniques to help your employees navigate challenging interactions and maintain a safe, supportive environment for everyone involved.

## Verbal Communication Skills

Verbal communication skills encompass how you speak to others, including the words you select and how you deliver them, such as tone (angry or calm) and volume (loud or soft). While communicating remember to:

- Focus on the other person and show interest in what they're saying
- Maintain eye contact to convey engagement while staying calm and mindful of your delivery
- Speak clearly, at an appropriate volume and use simple language
- Listen without interrupting or offering unsolicited advice
- Seek understanding by asking questions like "help me understand why you're upset"

## Non-verbal Communication Skills

Non-verbal communication, encompassing body language and positioning, can either de-escalate or intensify a situation. Key points to remember:

- Use calm body language by maintaining a relaxed posture, unclenched hands, and an attentive expression
- Match the other person's physical level (sitting/standing) and give them adequate personal space
- Position yourself at a right angle rather than directly facing the other person
- Avoid using gestures that may appear confrontational, such as hands on hips, pointing finger, or crossing arms

## How to End a 'Challenging Interaction'

To end a challenging interaction safely and effectively:

- Calmly tell the person that abusive treatment will not be tolerated, and that the conversation will end if needed
- End the conversation in a non-threatening way and ask the person to leave or remove yourself
- If the person refuses to leave, seek assistance from your supervisor and ensure other staff vacate the area
- Contact security or local authorities if needed
- Follow workplace reporting procedures and follow-up with your supervisor

Refining communication skills and knowing how to handle challenging interactions will help your team manage customer interactions confidently. These practices are key to maintaining a positive and psychologically safe atmosphere for both staff and guests.

## Additional Resources

- [CCOHS- Dealing with Negative Interactions](#)  
Find guidance on handling negative workplace interactions, including managing conflicts, de-escalating hostile behavior, and maintaining safety. This resource offers tips for effective communication, recognizing verbal and non-verbal cues, and safely resolving threatening situations to foster a respectful work environment.
- [Workplace Strategies for Mental Health- Tolerating Confrontation](#)  
Explore direction on managing confrontation by understanding emotional, cognitive, and physical reactions. This resource provides strategies for tolerating and responding to conflict, exploring different perspectives, and reflecting on personal triggers.