

Unreasonable Customer Behaviour

ARV Corporate Policy

1. Statement

When customers behave unreasonably in their dealings with Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV), their conduct can significantly impact staff wellbeing, as well as the effective and efficient delivery of services to all ARV customers and stakeholders. In the long term, the cumulative effect on mental health of staff and delivery of services can be profound.

As a result, ARV will take proactive and decisive action to manage any customer conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects staff and delivery of services and will support teams to do the same in accordance with this policy. ARV has zero tolerance for those customers whose behaviour can be deemed unreasonable, offensive, abusive or threatening towards to staff, contractors, volunteers and Board Directors.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Employees who carry out services on behalf ARV. It recognises that Employees may be exposed to a range of unreasonable customer behaviour during the provision of these services, whether that be via face-to-face interactions, telephone, email, digital communication platforms and social media, and includes any work-related incidents that occur outside of the workplace or outside of working hours.

3. Requirements

3.1 Policy Principles

Unreasonable customer behaviour is any behaviour which, because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for ARV, its staff, other service users and customers. Unreasonable customer behaviour can be divided into five categories of conduct:

- a) **Unreasonable persistence:** Refusing to accept a final decision even though the matter has been dealt with to finality, or inflexibly persevering with an issue by continuing to contact ARV or re-framing an old matter without providing reasonable grounds or new information.
- b) **Unreasonable demands:** Raising issues outside ARV's responsibility, asking for outcomes that are unattainable or disproportionate to the issue, requesting actions that are inappropriate or demanding for the matter to be dealt with in a particular way that is not feasible for ARV to undertake.
- c) **Unreasonable lack of cooperation:** Providing disorganised, excessive, or irrelevant information, refusing to provide key documents or to define the issues of the complaint, dishonestly presenting the facts or being unwilling to consider other valid viewpoints.
- d) **Unreasonable arguments:** Exaggerating issues, seeing cause and effect arguments where there are clearly none, holding conspiracy theories or irrational beliefs, raising issues which lack merit and are unsupported by evidence or irrationally interpreting facts or laws and refusing to accept other more reasonable interpretations.

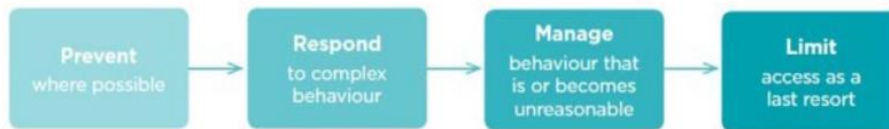
- e) **Unreasonable behaviours:** Demonstrating extreme anger, aggression, threats or other threatening or violent conduct.

In response to this behaviour, ARV may limit when and how a customer can interact with ARV. If a customer's telephone, written, online or face-to-face contact with ARV places an unreasonable demand on staff time or resources because it is overly lengthy (e.g. disorganised and voluminous correspondence), or affects the health, safety, wellbeing and security of employees because it involves behaviour that is persistently rude, threatening, abusive or aggressive, ARV may limit when and/or how the customer can interact with the organisation.

3.2 Policy Response

The Prevent, Respond, Manage and Limit model provided by the Victorian Ombudsman guides ARV's response and actions regarding unreasonable customer behaviour directed towards its Employees.

As a public facing organisation, Employees will encounter a range of complex behaviour, ranging from slightly confronting, to unreasonable, and through to unacceptable. To balance ARV's customer commitment with its commitments to the health, safety, and wellbeing of Employees, ARV's response to unreasonable customer behaviour is guided by the below graduating approach:



3.3 Prevent

Employees may be able to prevent unreasonable customer behaviour by following ARV's Complaints and Grievances Resolution Policy. This includes practising the below complaint handling techniques:

- Seeking to be empathetic, easy to communicate with, and non-defensive.
- Responding promptly and setting response timeframe expectations from the outset.
- Talking in language the customer understands and without jargon.
- Treating customers with respect and courtesy.
- Stepping into difficult conversations.
- Participating in reflective and learning practices as an individual and as a team.

However, ARV recognises that customers may display unreasonable behaviour despite Employees displaying good complaint handling techniques, or they may not give them the opportunity to practise these techniques before displaying the unreasonable behaviour.

3.4 Respond

Customers can become angry or frustrated with ARV's actions or decisions, may refuse to listen to advice and responses being provided, or present as vulnerable or distressed. Where a customer is emotional about their complaint or issue, Employees may be able to defuse these situations by:

- Taking control of their own emotions and avoid sounding defensive.
- Acknowledging how the person feels and giving them the feeling that they are being heard.
- Avoiding using words or phrases such as "Unfortunately" and "I wish I could help you, but"
- Re-focusing the conversation onto the complaint/issue and on identifying possible solutions.
- Escalating the matter to their supervisor if they cannot diffuse the situation.
- Participating in de-escalation and diffusing training and regular conversations as a team about successful diffusing techniques and experiences.

However, in situations where a customer is displaying unacceptable behaviour, ARV does not expect Employees to continue the interaction.

3.5 Manage

Employees should feel empowered in the moment to take steps to address a customer's unreasonable behaviour during a phone or face to face interaction, especially if the interaction results in a stress response for the Employee. The strategy or strategies that can be used will depend on the type of behaviour. The below information is a high-level guide to assist Managers and Employees in managing unreasonable customer behaviour.

a) Managing Unreasonable Customer Behaviour

The Employee should first attempt de-escalation techniques if they feel they can without inciting the situation further. The customer should be passed on to the Employee's Manager if:

- They feel unable to de-escalate the situation
- The de-escalation techniques they tried are ineffective
- If they have experienced a stress response
- The behaviour impacts upon ARV's ability to deliver services fairly and effectively

If Employees are unable to transition the interaction to a Manager, they are empowered to respectfully bring the interaction to a close. Bringing the interaction to a close should include clear communication to the customer regarding continuing the interaction at a later date or time.

Any post incident communication with the customer by the Manager should include a reminder that while ARV respects the right for people to feel frustrated, angry, or upset, it expects that customers will interact respectfully with its employees.

b) Managing Unacceptable Behaviour

The following are considered unacceptable behaviour:

- Threats of physical harm
- Actual physical harm, no matter how minor
- Threatening, offensive, insulting, abusive, degrading language or behaviour
- Displaying behaviour or language that demonstrates a personal grudge.
- Making serious allegations without any evidence
- Racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, disablist comments, or other harassment based on personal characteristics.
- Demanding disciplinary action be taken against the employee
- Recording interactions, meetings, or telephone conversations without consent
- Defamation
- Personal attacks on social media including on third party pages and personal social media accounts where the content of the attack is related to the persons work

Communication not aimed at ARV or ARV's staff but at third parties may also be deemed unacceptable because of the effect that seeing, listening to, or reading them may have.

Responses to unacceptable behaviour:

- If Employees are exposed to face-to-face verbal abuse that they are unable to de-escalate or manage safely, including threats of harm or acts of violence of any nature, they should remove themselves from that situation immediately, or if they cannot remove themselves from the situation, keep a safe distance from the person and ensure their Manager or another appropriate person attends to provide them with support. This is irrespective of whether the interaction is occurring 1:1 or in a group setting.
- Employees are empowered to end a phone interaction immediately if the customer threatens their safety in any way. If staff feel safe to continue a phone interaction where a customer is displaying unacceptable behaviour, they must advise the customer that they cannot assist them if this behaviour does not cease

immediately. If the behaviour continues, Employees are empowered to advise the customer that they are ending the phone call. After ending the call, they must advise their Manager immediately so a suitable communication plan for the customer is arranged.

- If Employees receive emails or read social media communications that contains abusive language, threats, or any form of written aggression towards Employees, they must escalate the situation to their Manager. The Manager should develop a plan of response or non-response to the customer that considers the nature of the complaint, whether the customer has identified themselves online, any previous communication on the same complaint, and whether a resolution has been reached from ARV's perspective. The response or non-response plan may require the input of a General Manager and may include reporting the customer to Police if threats are made towards employees. Any response to the customer must include that the behaviour shown towards employees is never acceptable and will not be tolerated.
- Comments that are on social media pages managed by ARV will be resolved following the social media community guidelines and disclaimer.
- Comments and posts made on a customer's personal social media accounts or those hosted by a third party (including community groups) should be escalated by the Employee through to their Manager. All social media platforms have community guidelines for acceptable content - if the post goes against these guidelines the post can be reported to the platform requesting that the content is removed. If the post is threatening in any way Employees should contact local Police with the support of their Manager.

If abuse or threats by the customer continue towards the Employee, including the Manager, the situation must be reported to the relevant General Manager for assessment under Section 3.6: Limit.

3.6 Limit

a) Limiting Access

ARV can consider limiting access to the organisation if other strategies have not worked and the customer continues to engage in unreasonable behaviour. This may include:

- Limiting their contact to a particular time of the day or days of the week.
- Limiting the length or duration of that contact.
- Limiting the frequency of contact.
- Limiting communications to written communications only.

For irrelevant, overly lengthy, disorganised or frequent written correspondence, ARV may also:

- Require the customer to clearly identify how the information or supporting materials they have sent to staff relate to the central issues identified in their complaint.
- Restrict the frequency with which customers can send emails or other written communications to ARV.
- Restrict a customer to sending emails to a particular email account (e.g. the organisation's main email account).
- Email only to a specific staff email or general office email account.

If a customer is violent or overtly aggressive, or is unreasonably disruptive, threatening or demanding, ARV will consider restricting face-to-face contact with them. These restrictions may include:

- Restricting access to secured premises or areas of the office – such as the reception area or a secured room/facility.
- Restricting their ability to attend ARV premises to specified times of the day and/or days of the week only – for example, at times/days that are less busy.
- Allowing them to attend ARV's office on an 'appointment only' basis and only with specified staff. Note – during these meetings staff should always seek support and assistance of a colleague for added safety and security.
- Restricting the customer from attending ARV premises altogether and allowing some other form of contact – e.g. 'writing only' or 'telephone only' contact. In cases where ARV cannot completely restrict contact with

a customer and their conduct is particularly difficult to manage, ARV may restrict contact through a support person or representatives.

b) Terminating Access to ARV Facilities, Programs or Services

In very rare cases, and as an absolute last resort when all other strategies have been considered and/or tried, the CEO may decide that it is necessary for ARV to completely restrict a customer's contact/access to ARV's services. A decision to have no further contact with a customer will only be made if it appears that the customer is unlikely to modify their conduct and/or their conduct poses a significant risk for Employees or other parties because it involves one or more of the following types of conduct:

- Acts of aggression, verbal and/or physical abuse, threats of harm, harassment, intimidation, stalking, assault
- Damage to property while on ARV premises.
- Threats with a weapon or common office items that can be used to harm another person or themselves.
- Physically preventing a staff member from moving around freely either within their office or during an off-site visit – e.g. entrapping them in their home.
- Conduct that is otherwise unlawful.

In these cases, the customer will be sent a letter notifying them that their access has been restricted. Victoria Police may also be notified in these circumstances. A customer's access to ARV services and premises may also be restricted (directly or indirectly) using legal mechanisms such as trespass laws/legislation or legal orders to protect members of our staff from personal violence, intimidation or stalking by a customer.

ARV recognises that such measures are extreme and should not be lightly imposed. Such measures will only be resorted to in the most serious of cases where the CEO is satisfied that other, less restrictive, measures will not be effective to protect staff and others.

c) Right of Appeal

Customers banned or restricted due to unreasonable or unacceptable behaviour are entitled to one appeal of a decision to change/restrict their access to ARV staff and/or services. Any appeal will be reviewed and determined by a member of the Executive Team who was not involved in the original decision to change or restrict the customer's access

4. Responsibilities

Position	Responsibility
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complying with ARV's Complaints and Grievances Resolution Policy and Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy.• Reporting any incidents involving unacceptable customer behaviour to their Manager in the first instance and also through the OHS/incident management system.• Advising their Manager immediately if a customer interaction has been closed out because of an unmanageable stress response.• Identifying with their Manager what stress response decompression actions are needed.
Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Familiarising themselves with the guidance and requirements contained in this procedure.• Actively supporting employees following any incident involving Occupational Violence and Aggression (OVA), including offering of EAP support were required.

- Supporting affected employees to enter an OHS report in Incident Management System.
 - Supporting an employees decision to close out a customer interaction if they have been unable to manage / down-regulate a stress response or escalate the interaction.
 - Developing and implementing a communication strategy for the Customer following an incident of unreasonable customer behaviour that places the health, safety, and wellbeing of ARV staff.
 - Communicating ARV's expectation of respectful interactions to a customer following an incident
 - Participating in OVA incident investigations with the OHS team with the view to identifying improvements in ARV's systems and processes to prevent future incidents.
- People & Culture
- Provide EAP support to Employees and Managers where required
 - Investigate OVA OHS incidents.
- Governance & Risk
- Investigate external complaints.

5. Legislation

- Victorian OHS Act 2004
- Victorian OHS Regulations 2017 Online Safety Act 2021

6. Related documents

- ARV's Complaints and Grievances Resolution Policy
- Social media community guidelines and disclaimer

7. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

Term	Definition
Employees	Staff, contractors, consultants, volunteers and Board Directors who carry out services on behalf of ARV.
Customer	Includes residents, ratepayers, members of the public or groups, visitors, businesses within the municipality or other entities and authorities, and people who have work- related contact with employees.
Work- related stress	Work-related stress is the physical and psychological response of an employee who perceives that the demands of their work or workplace environment exceed their ability or resources to cope. It is subjective and individual, and while work-related stress does not itself constitute physical or psychological harm or injury, it can result in an injury if it is prolonged or severe.

Stress response (fight-flight)	A biological and psychological response experienced when upon encountering a situation we feel we do not have the resources to deal with. Common physical signs of a stress response include a pounding heart, quickened breathing, and tense muscles.
Stress response down- regulation	Actions that support a return to calm/relaxed physical and/or psychological state after a period.
Occupational Violence and Aggression (OVA)	OVA refers to any incident where an employee is verbally, physically, or psychologically abused, threatened, or harassed while carrying out their work duties, including actions like verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, physical assault, and aggressive behaviour from customers, clients, or other individuals they interact with in the workplace.
EAP (Employee Assistance Program)	A confidential counselling service ARV offer to their employees to help with personal and work-related issues.

8. Approval and implementation

Policy Custodian	Policy contact details	Approval Date	Approver
General Manager, Corporate Services	peopleandculture@alpineresorts.vic.gov.au	February 2025	ARV Board

9. Version Control

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