

Amended Extract of Commonwealth Ombudsman Resource – Tips and Scripts for Complaint Conversations

INITIAL TIPS:

Open questions (those requiring more than just a “yes” or “no”) will help extract information from the person that you are talking to, without “leading” them to answers.

Closed questions will help clarify and confirm what the person that you are talking to is saying.

| Actions | Script Ideas |
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| <p>Testing expectations – finding out what the complainant expects and wants to <u>focus the discussion</u>.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can I help you? • What are you hoping to achieve by contacting us/bringing your complaint to our attention? • What outcome are you hoping for? • [To parents...] What is it that your child wants? • What do you think our organisation can do for you? • What can we do to resolve this in a way that is fair to everyone? • Let’s explore your goals in this situation. • How do you propose that we resolve this/work through this? • Let me explain what happens under the Safe Sport Framework when you make a complaint. • Would it help if I explained how the complaints process works under the Safe Sport Framework? |
| <p>Understanding more about the details of the complaint – gathering the <u>key facts</u></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The safety of children in our sport is paramount... so if you have any concerns at all, it’s important that we explore those. • Ensuring the wellbeing of children and members in swimming is our number one priority. You’ve done the right thing to contact us – thank you. • Can you please talk me through what you saw? • What happened? Then what happened? • Can you tell me more? • When did this occur? • Where did this occur? • Who was involved? • Is there anyone else that you think may have seen or heard anything? • Were there any witnesses? [If so] Who? Do you know whether they would be comfortable talking to us further? [If not] Do you think that if you explained how important it is to the safety of children in swimming, that they might change their mind and contact us? • How did [those actions/that behaviour] impact on you and/or others? • Why do you think this occurred? • Help me understand... • Describe... • Explain to me... • What else did you notice? |

Defining the issues of complaint – clarifying the complainant’s issues to determine whether they can be dealt with by your organisation

- As I understand it, you’re concerned about ... and.... Is this correct? (Allow for clarification) And you want ... to happen. Is that correct?
- You appear to be complaining about ... and.... Is this correct? (Allow for clarification) ... is an issue we can look at, but ... and ... aren’t things we can take up because
- Are you saying that...?
- Let me see if I understand your issue(s).
- And am I correct that you want ... to happen?
- Can you share that with me one more time just to make sure I understand you completely?
- Thank you for going to the trouble of explaining this to me. As I understand it you’re saying ...

If the complainant is rambling:

- Thanks for providing those details. You have obviously [been through a lot/been impacted by these events]. I just need to know...
- So that I don’t waste your time, why don’t you tell me about
- Tell me what the key issue is that you’re complaining about.

Retesting and reframing expectations - correcting any misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations

- Are you aware of what our organisation can do? (often the answer is ‘not really’) Perhaps I could tell you a bit about the Safe Sport Framework and what we can and can’t do.
- Let me explain what we can do under the Safe Sport Framework.
- ... is what we can do.... we can’t do....
- I realise that you want.... We can/can’t do ...because....
- won’t happen because...However, might be possible.
- Whilst we won’t be able to do that.... we may/will be able to...
- So that you aren’t disappointed later on, I should clarify now that it is very unlikely that we’ll be able to do ... because....
- It seems to me you’re hoping we can do ... Whilst I have to tell you now that this will not be possible because ...

Preparing the complainant for disappointment – delivering bad news as early as possible to avoid the complainant developing unrealistic expectations about their complaint and any possible outcomes

- I wanted to call you and tell you about the outcome/decision of your complaint before I send out a letter, because I know the outcome isn’t what you’d hoped for (explain).
- I wanted to call you to explain why we are unable to progress with your complaint further before I send you a letter saying this (explain).
- Of course, the decision will be sent to you in writing. Speaking with you means I can also answer any questions you have about the decision/ outcome.

Note: Although these conversations are not easy, they allow you to discuss the ‘bad news’ on your own terms and at a time when you are mentally prepared to do so – instead of some hours, days or weeks after you have sent the complainant their final letter and they have had time to script or rehearse a response to the bad news.

Things will only escalate over time so it is better to address things as early as possible. This is in line with our Complaints Commitment in the Safe Sport Framework.