

# Health & Safety guidance for voluntary bat roost visitors: dealing with violence and aggression

## What about violence and aggression?

The risk of experiencing aggression, harassment or violence in association with roost visiting is very low. However, where there is even a small risk it is good to know how best to manage an incident.

It is very unlikely that any aggression or conflict you face is a result of something you have done. As difficult as it is, try not to take hostility personally; you may just be the person in the firing line. There is no set definition for what is 'abusive', as every individual has their own limits. It is up to each volunteer to decide when someone has reached that limit. People could display one or more of the following behaviours when being abusive:

- shouting;
- calling you unpleasant names;
- threatening;
- using an aggressive tone;
- using bad language.

## Managing the risks

When undertaking a bat roost visit ensure you:

- have the right skills and training;
- are prepared in the event of an incident.

## Right skills and training

Training on how to spot and control rising aggression and violence is available to Natural England VBRVs on the Skillport online learning system via the [Training page](#) of the Natural England website.

## Being prepared

When you are planning to go to a face-to-face meeting it is important to have as much information as possible about the person you are seeing.

Give yourself plenty of time to arrive at the agreed time. Communicate any changes or delays with the person you are visiting.

When arranging a roost visit over the phone you may get a feeling about the building occupier's mood or attitude. This might influence how you carry out the visit (eg. you might decide to ask another roost visitor to accompany you).

If you are attending a roost visit and the occupier(s) is (are) becoming agitated or aggressive there are a number of de-escalation techniques you can use. These work best if you choose one you feel comfortable with and can practise.

### 1. Simple listening

- Just listening, saying very little or nothing.
- Allow the person to vent their frustration and just be attentive.
- Nod your head and sometimes give encouragement, such as "Go on," or "Yes."

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### 2. Active listening

- Listen, acknowledge and demonstrate understanding and empathy with the individual by reflecting, clarifying and summarising his / her thoughts and feelings.
- Put yourself in the other person's situation as best you can.
- Active listening means attending not only to the words the other person is saying, but also the underlying emotion and accompanying body language.

### 3. Acknowledgement

- Acknowledge when you can legitimately understand the person's angry emotion.
- Be sincere and respond with, "I can see how something like that could make you angry!" You might say, "If that happened to me, I might be angry, too."
- Use a calming and respectful tone of voice designed to help the other person let go of their angry emotion - it confirms the legitimacy of the emotion, but not the behaviour.
- State that you want to help in any way you can.

### 4. Apologising

- Do apologise when something occurred that was not right.
- This is not about taking responsibility for something that was not your fault.
- You might say "I'm sorry the situation has frustrated you."

### 5. Agreeing

- When attempting to diffuse someone's anger, it is important to listen for any element of truth and acknowledge and agree with that.
- In many cases this will reduce the 'me against them' and diminish the fuel for the fire.

### 6. Your body language

- Be aware of your own body language and present a non-threatening, open stance. Try to avoid folded arms, leaning forward, furrowed eyebrows.
- Keep good eye contact but ensure this does not appear confrontational.

- Move slowly and steadily. Try to keep physical movements calm.
- Personal space: give people space. When people are under pressure or stressed, what is regarded as safe personal space is often expanded so where things might be escalating take a step back.

### If you feel the situation is escalating, always leave as soon as you can

Here are some quick tips to avoid an incident escalating:

- Park your car in a position that will allow you to leave easily.
- Say who you are, why you are there.
- Identify the person you are talking to, and any other person(s) present.
- If possible advise them of how much time your visit will require.
- Do not enter a house or building if the appropriate person is not available.
- Wait to be invited in. Acknowledge it is their territory by letting them lead the way.
- You may decide it is best not to go in or to leave immediately eg if the person has been drinking or is aggressive. Trust your instincts.
- Ensure you can get out quickly if necessary.
- If you are not happy for dogs or other animals to be present, ask for them to be put in another room.
- Remain alert. Watch for changes in mood, movements or expressions.

### Reporting an incident

You must report any accident, near miss or incident which occurs whilst performing or travelling to / from a roost visit to Natural England as soon as possible:

- Contact the Natural England 'near miss and incident reporting line' at any time on 0300 060 0100.
- If the incident results in injury to another person or damage to property please also

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contact: Martin Rhodes 0300 060 2676 or Lucy Foster 0300 060 0666.

### Feedback

If you have any feedback about this guidance or would like to see additions / amendments please get in touch by emailing:

[batvolunteers@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:batvolunteers@naturalengland.org.uk)

### Further information

Please see our website page and other VBRV health and safety leaflets at:

[Health and safety for voluntary bat roost visitors](#)

[Publications for voluntary bat roost visitors](#)

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk).

For further information contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 0863 or e-mail [enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk).

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ISBN 978-1-78354-040-2