

## 9. Managing aggressive reactions

The following The Indian Model School tips will help staffs to deal with complainants whose approach is aggressive.

Use these tips before the level of emotional intensity has risen or after it has dropped. Often the complainant will indicate their readiness to start engaging in a more constructive dialogue by sighing or shifting position.

### Persist

- Use the broken record technique. Repeat what you have said without adding further argument or reason. For example:
  - ‘We need to discuss this away from the children. Please come with me to my office’ or
  - ‘We need to talk about this in my office away from the children’ or
  - ‘My office is this way. We can continue this conversation away from the children’.

### Emphasise your feelings

- Emphasise the importance of the subject to you personally. For example, ‘I am worried about this allegation and I’d like to start sorting it out now’.

### Acknowledge and continue

- Acknowledge their concerns but don’t let the discussion stop there: continue immediately towards a solution. For example, ‘Yes, I know it is an unsatisfactory situation for you, and I would prefer...’.
- As in the example above, use ‘and’ rather than ‘but’. If you use ‘but’, the listener invariably hears only that part of the sentence that follows the ‘but’. They might interpret what you are saying as a demand, increasing the likelihood of a defensive reaction.

### Ask open questions to explore possibilities

- For example:
  - ‘What would we need to do to improve the current situation?’
  - ‘How do you think we could satisfy your son’s needs?’
  - ‘What would you like to see happen as a result of our discussion?’

### Disagree if necessary

- Say if you don’t agree with a point being made, but try to establish areas of agreement. For example:
  - ‘I don’t see the situation like that ... I think we both agree that ...’.

### Reschedule

- Reschedule if necessary to ensure there is adequate time to discuss the issues. Rescheduling may also help to defuse the situation. For example:
  - ‘There is a better time to discuss this issue in the detail required. When do you have an hour we can both set aside?’

### Follow-up

- After any situation marked by aggression, awkwardness or uncertainty, take the time to follow up with a letter, brief note or phone call. This is likely to make further interactions with the people involved smoother.