



Ombudsman
Toronto

Listening. Investigating. Improving City Services.

Meeting Client and Stakeholder Needs on the Frontlines – Practical Tips for Addressing Conflict and Crisis

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Ombudsman Toronto

Listening. Investigating. Improving City Services.

We work to ensure that City of Toronto services
and administration are fair to all.



The Fairness Triangle



We apply a fairness lens to:

- The complaints we review
- The services that we provide the public
 - Including, in particular, service to members of the public who are exhibiting difficult behaviour

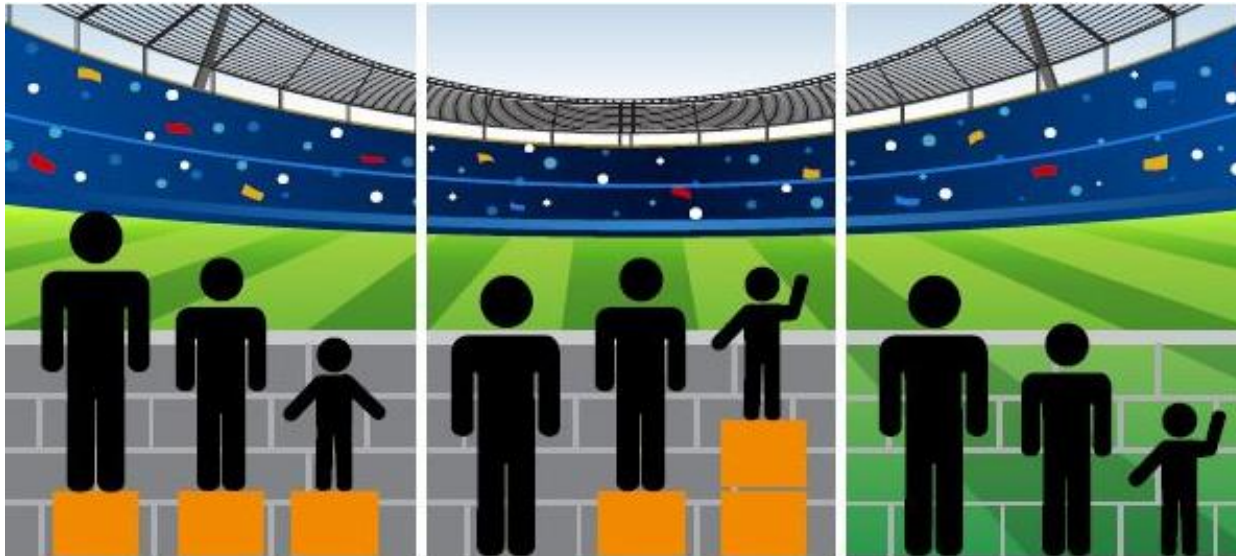


Fair Treatment

- Every person who deals with a government tribunal or agency has the right to be treated with dignity, respect and care.
- Equality of treatment is not enough. The law requires that to be treated fairly, every person must be treated equitably.



Ombudsman Toronto Stands Up for Fairness



Equity Focuses On Impact, Not Effort

- In order to be fair, the way we treat people must account for their individual circumstances and needs.
- This may include consideration of factors such as:
 - Level of education and literacy
 - Language
 - Ethnicity
 - Creed
 - Culture
 - Family status
 - Gender
 - Sexual Orientation
 - Social identity
 - Disability



Ensuring Fair Process and Fair Treatment Can be Challenging

- Sometimes, it can be extremely difficult, for example when someone behaves in a way that is:
 - unreasonably persistent
 - argumentative
 - angry
 - trying to take over your process
 - rude (“you work for me”)
- Remember, though, that **everyone** is entitled to administrative fairness.



The Bottom Line

- The easiest solution, at least in the short term, might seem to be to simply deny someone service when they are displaying difficult behaviour or creating situations of conflict.
- But this is not generally fair.
- We have a duty to provide service, and to explore ways we can reasonably and safely do this.



Framework for Responding to Challenging Behaviour



Source: [Good Practice Guide to Dealing with Challenging Behaviour](#) (Victoria Ombudsman)



Staff Need Training, Support and Tools to Respond Confidently and Consistently

- For example:
 - Trauma informed complaint handling
 - Mental Health First Aid training (Mental Health Commission of Canada)
 - Knowledge of community resources
 - E.g. Distress Centres of Greater Toronto, Toronto Seniors Helpline, LGBT Youthline. The City has a good [website](#) listing mental health resources
 - The [Global Community Resource Guide](#) (Scarborough Health Network) is also a useful City-wide resource
 - [211](#) is another useful resource



Tribunals and Agencies Should Have Policies and Practices for Responding to Unreasonable Behaviour and Conflict

- If not properly handled, these situations can have a disproportionately negative impact on staff, service, time, resources and culture.
- Staff should have clear guidance on things like when to escalate a complaint to management; how they should respond to threatening behaviour or language; and how to document instances of challenging behaviour.



In Some Cases, Alternate Service Arrangements May be a Useful Tool for Management to Explore.

- What is the least restrictive arrangement possible?
 - Each situation is unique
- Some examples:
 - Requiring someone to schedule a visit in advance
 - Only allowing someone to communicate with your office in writing
 - Only allowing someone to communicate with one particular person
- You must explain the reason for the arrangement, how long it will be in place, and ensure the person knows how they can access services from you. Ideally this should be in writing.



Practice, Reflect and Learn

- Providing service to the public is not always easy; sometimes, it is very hard.
- Make it your mission to enhance the fairness of your tribunal or agency by the way you interact with members of the public every day.
- Develop and hone your skills for responding effectively to challenging behaviour. Review individual cases on your own and with your team; they are valuable teachers.
- Regularly review all cases where you apply Alternate Service Arrangements.



Helpful Resources

- [Good Practice Guide to Dealing with Challenging Behaviour](#)
(Victoria Ombudsman)
- [Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct - Practice Manual](#) (New South Wales Ombudsman)
- [Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Model Policy](#)
(New South Wales Ombudsman)
- [Unacceptable Actions Policy](#)
(Scottish Public Service Ombudsman)



Ways to Connect with Ombudsman Toronto

Ombudsman Toronto


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