



How to be a good neighbour

A guide to solving neighbour disputes

Foreword

Dear Dimensions,

“We have recently purchased a home next door to one of your properties. We are having to go round on a daily basis and ask for the music, telly etc to be turned down and for the person you support to not be shouting especially early on a weekend morning. Today he could be heard in our bedrooms and he was downstairs so being very loud.

The carers seem very apologetic but have asked that we personally talk to him as he won't always listen to them. We've tried but to no avail. His music can also go on late into the evening and it keeps my daughter awake on a school night. The music can be heard above our own telly. This cannot continue.

I appreciate that the carers are doing quite a difficult job as I used to work in a residential school for children with autism. The last thing we want is for the person you support to be distressed however we cannot allow this to be at the detriment of our childrens' education.

Myself and my partner work full time in stressful jobs, this stress at home is impacting on our sleep and beginning to have a knock on effect on our jobs. We suggest that if the carers are unable to teach him how to live in the community respecting his neighbours that they undergo further training to enable this skill. We have noted that the carers appear to be appeasing him by allowing him to have his music on loudly and that he can be exceptionally excitable and loud. The property appears to be open plan so this tends to amplify noise naturally.

We suggest that soundproofing adjoining walls upstairs and down could be a way of remedying this problem. We would very much like to resolve this issues with yourselves so that we can move on with everyday life but must stress that if this continues we are prepared to take the issue to the council and the letting agent for the property...”

Neighbour of a person we support

Introduction

“To have good neighbours, we must be good neighbours.”

Building the right relationship with neighbours can make the difference between somebody living a difficult life and a great life, with all the consequent impact on community involvement, staff morale and retention, and so on.

Ultimately of course neighbours can ask landlords to evict someone for ‘nuisance.’ If they live in a property owned by Dimensions, a council or a housing association, a process would be followed and a court order would be needed. But private landlords can serve notice without having to prove fault.

Colleagues also report hate-type behaviours from the neighbours and the importance of asserting and defending a person’s human rights.

This short guide describes a wide range of difficult situations that Dimensions colleagues have experienced, and how these have been resolved. It won’t provide an answer to every difficulty but you may find some helpful pointers in there.

Many colleagues have contributed to this guide; support workers and managers, family consultants and operations directors. Not all the situations described here are success stories; thank you to all those who offered their experiences so others could learn.



We have had issues with staff car parking, noise levels and a petition when one of our services opened, saying that we had lowered the price of their property!
Operations Director





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Proper introductions, respecting privacy, respecting parking agreements and keeping the surroundings looking tidy and cared for seem to be vital and should be actively initiated and consistently maintained by all support staff.
Family consultant



1. Waiting for things to go wrong

Communicate, communicate, communicate.

This is by far the most important recommendation in this guide. It is common sense but many of the contributors to this guide have not tried to build any sort of relationship with neighbours.

Without a relationship, small issues and misunderstandings can quickly spiral out of control. But if you speak to the neighbours, if they feel they have someone to talk to, you'll get an early warning of issues and be able to tackle them before they become unmanageable.

If you're starting a new service, or if you've got new people next door, that's the best time to say hello to the neighbours. But it's never too late to reach out. Try some of the ideas below:

- “Phil bought his own shared ownership house and right from the beginning introduced himself and his staff team to all neighbours. Staff explained about their role, they agreed rules such as not parking in spaces assigned to others, not too much noise after 10pm, etc. This led to 14 very happy and unproblematic years in that house! He has now moved to another house and has done the same, especially to ask them to address any concerns to support staff or himself directly rather than contacting the police! In my own introduction to neighbours I also explain a bit about my son's disabilities in order to alleviate any fears and do a bit of educating the public!” Family Consultant
- “When starting a new service, we visit neighbours to explain who we are and what we do, and if those we support are happy we invite neighbours in for a cup of tea. We always provide contact details. If there's a waking night, we also point out that this makes the community safer as someone on the street is awake all night long...” Operations Director
- “Get things going by sending the neighbours a Christmas card with a nice long note in it. Or an Easter egg. Any excuse really. You'll be amazed at what can develop when you take the initiative.” Family Consultant
- “If you're having work done on the house, pre-warn the neighbours. It's polite, and it gets a conversation going.” Family consultant
- “If there's something you can both be cross about, be cross together. It's amazing how people can make friends over a shared enemy...” Family Consultant
- “Accidents happen. If a person you support has damaged a neighbour's property, particularly if damage is done to fencing, tell the neighbour you'll get it fixed and do so quickly.” Locality Manager



It's never too late to reach out



2. Noise

Noise is overwhelmingly the major issue reported by colleagues.

Outside, shouting and offensive language stop neighbours from enjoying their garden, having grandchildren, other family and friends over or even opening their windows on a hot day.

Inside, banging on walls, shouting, loud music and so on intrude on neighbours' daily life. It may keep their daughter awake during an exam period. It may prevent paramedics and firemen from sleeping. Noise is transferred through open windows, shared walls and other physical connections.

There's almost always something that can be done to reduce noise. And we must avoid the 'appeasing' behaviour described in the complaint letter on page 1.

Communicate often

Peter loves noise and especially vibration. Anything that creates resonance or an echo soothes him... beating his sofa, listening to a heartbeat, moving furniture around, howling and screeching... but unfortunately not all those near him share the same view.

Although Peter lives in a detached bungalow, the neighbours' concrete driveway effectively transmits and amplifies vibration direct from Peter's bedroom to their lounge. Because this was unexpected, we had no idea until we received a complaint that the neighbours were being affected. And they were concerned about the resulting resale value of their house.

Solutions to this are hard to find. Soft furnishings would reduce the vibration but cause Peter stress. He can't move room and we can't dig up the driveway. But simply by building a constant relationship with the neighbours, being on the end of the phone if needed, and updating them – even if there's nothing new to say – has proved a very positive experience.

Know what grants are available

"Tom hates and gets extremely stressed by children and dogs. The neighbours have both. We were able to apply for funding through the council's disabilities grant to add soundproofing, double glazing and curtains to block them out."

Family consultant

“ There's almost always something that can be done to reduce noise. ”

3. Case study: How a new home layout helped tackle noise



“I wish we’d chatted to the neighbours before Dave moved in,” reflects manager Ollie, “if we’d put that in the plan, we might have nipped some of the issues we faced in the bud.”

Dave moved into supported living on 2:1 staffing from ATU. He has a complex mix of different behaviours which particularly include extreme, loud verbal aggression.

The neighbours, used to a peaceful environment, complained to the local authority and the housing association that they could no longer use their garden or have their grandchildren to stay. As Dave moved in at the start of summer, there was a particularly high impact on the neighbours’ daily life.

“We met the neighbours several times and made sure they knew how to get hold of us at all times,” recalls Ollie, “It helped them to know what Dimensions does; they were quick to support our values and beliefs. Of course fostering positive local relationships is a very high priority for us too – starting with fixing the noise problem.”

But over time, the PBS and other plans weren’t having much impact on Dave’s shouting. Plan B, if we were unable to reduce Dave’s shouting, was to reduce its impact. Together, we identified that the route staff would use to withdraw (during particular behaviours) was at the heart of the problem. Staff had to withdraw out of Dave’s front door, before re-entering the staff flat. Dave would then direct his anger outside.

“ [The neighbours] have seen how much effort we’ve made to make things better. ”



There was no simple solution, but the Housing Association, with whom we had built a strong relationship, was also keen to get the situation resolved.

By changing the building layout – adding an internal corridor – staff are now able to withdraw without leaving the building, and the noise remains largely internal. A new entrance was also added for the staff flat, to avoid staff having to go through Dave’s garden which was a particular trigger for him.

“It’s been nine months since I last heard from the neighbours,” says Ollie, “They’ve seen how much effort we’ve made to make things better and I know they are now friendly with the support staff. Dave is settled in his house and so we are just beginning to think whether the time is right to introduce them to Dave properly.”

Top tip:

You can also keep the neighbours friendly by a regular stream of things like Christmas cards and home baking and maybe offer to take in parcels as well.

4. Parking


Issues with parking is one of the most common neighbour disputes in this country.

Staff cars may take up limited parking places and force neighbours to park some distance away from their houses. This may be a mild inconvenience or, as in the case with disabled people or families with very young children or heavy shopping, may pose a real problem.

Talk to the neighbours about what works for them, and please go the extra mile and park considerately.

Oh – and some people choose to maintain their own grass verges. Are you parking on the grass?

Liz Wilson, Family Consultant advises: “Explain to the neighbours why (if) it is essential to have a car nearby. Don’t get into arguments, no matter how ridiculous the neighbours are being. I once had a neighbour complain about the ambulance that was saving my daughter’s life. You can’t argue with people like that, you’ll never win. However, if you have to break the rules, maybe put a note on your car or through their door to explain and even given them a bunch a flowers.”



Talk to the neighbours about what works for them, and please go the extra mile and park considerately.

5. Case study: Getting to the heart of parking problems



Two children were arguing about who should have the last orange in the fruit bowl. At 7.30 in the morning, when they needed to be ready to leave the house by 7.45 it would have been easy for a parent to snap ‘neither of you can have it’ or ‘give me a knife, you can have half each.’ However, a wise mother asked ‘what do you need it for?’ and discovered that her daughter needed the zest for her cookery class, and her son wanted to drink the juice. They could both have what they wanted without compromise or disappointment!

When there is a neighbour dispute it is tempting to rush in with great ideas of how to solve the problem and to offer our own version of solutions and compromise. What we really need to do it to acknowledge the distress the situation is causing and to ask ‘what would you like to see?’

Some gentle exploratory questions can gather enough information to come up with lasting solutions.

We support three people in a house on a quiet cul-de-sac where there is generally enough parking and people are happy to park their car in any of the available slots. However, Mrs B, an elderly lady who doesn’t drive, gets very cross if someone parks outside of her house. She always assumes that it is one of our colleagues, although just as often it is a visitor to one of the other households. Staff are fed up of her shouting at them as they think she is being mean-spirited.



The assistant locality manager decided to take a different approach and called on her with a bunch of flowers one afternoon when there was nobody parked outside of the house. She apologised and explained that all of the team have been asked never to park outside of the house and regularly park a five minute walk away. In conversation it turned out that Mrs B's son calls around on his way home from work on Friday afternoons. He's the only visitor she gets all week and the time he spends with her is precious. He's on a tight schedule so if he has to park further away then they lose precious minutes.

The ALM offers to tell the other neighbours about this (there are only 8 households), and as a result, the man at number 4 offers his driveway as he's never home until 7pm and Mrs B's son always leaves at 6.30pm.

As a result of this conversation, Mrs B has been able to be reassured, knowing that her son's visits won't be cut short, and the neighbours all know they can park outside of the house whenever they need to. People wave and stop to chat with Mrs B on a regular basis now that they know she's lonely not mean!

6. Mess and litter

“This is a problem in at least three quarters of the quality checks I do in Dimensions properties.
Family Consultant



Often, the problem is that people get habituated. How long has that old washing machine been in your front garden? If it's more than a week, the chances are you won't even notice it any more. But your neighbours certainly will.

“He made sure, supported by staff, that his garden in front of the house looked nice and tidy!” Family consultant

Your front garden tells people a lot about you. Is yours neat and tidy, or scruffy and full of rubbish? What impression is given by the front garden of the person you support?

It is more than a mild annoyance. It can be demoralising for a neighbour to feel that they live on a grotty street. And it certainly doesn't encourage that neighbour to want to develop a relationship with staff or the person you're supporting there. It's a huge psychological barrier, and one that is easy to fix.

“It's horrid when your neighbour doesn't care about the state of their front (or back) garden. If there's old fridges, carpets, lights and bin bags lying around. People read a great deal into that sort of thing. It makes you think you live on a bad street. It directly affects relationships. If you don't have a great relationship with a neighbour, try tidying up your front garden. You'll be amazed what happens.” Family Consultant



7. Overlooking each other

People do not like to feel that they are being watched when in their garden, but many people with learning disabilities enjoy looking out of their window, or across low garden borders.

Don't let boundary disagreements get in the way. If a fence is required, put one in.

“A few of the houses I visited had issues with neighbours and I have to say I was not surprised: gardens were untidy and uncared for and there were no fences, so no privacy for either them or the neighbours. Residents frequently stood or sat in the garden “staring at the neighbours” which was resented. A fence could have solved the entire issue but no-one had thought of that.” Family Consultant

We received a complaint from a neighbour who felt that their privacy was impacted, with the people we support able to overlook their property. Dimensions, and the housing association met the neighbour at home.

Initially we added window restrictors allowing the windows to open a small way, but this led to the people we support feeling too hot in their flats. We found a reasonable balance and in addition, the Housing Association planted a row of trees to assure privacy. The neighbours were grateful and provided bedding plants in return to express their thanks.”

Remember to ask your neighbour's opinion before installing an expensive fence, and keep it in your boundary. Fences make good neighbours but figure high in the list of neighbour complaints. Also consider planting colourful shrubs as a screen too as they absorb some noise and mask the containment element of a high solid fence.



8. Hate-type behaviours

Most complaints from neighbours are framed, like the complaint letter in the foreword, in a positive way. Most people do not disrespect people with learning disabilities or autism, or bear them ill-will.

However, there are times when neighbours do display hate-type behaviours. Perhaps there's direct verbal abuse. Perhaps there's a more insidious approach, such as neighbours 'ganging up.' Though we hear about very few examples of this, the effect on the person you support, as well as the support team, can be traumatic, and profound.

If you are in this position, first decide whether or not to ignore the problem. Will it just go away or does it need sensitive handling? Dimensions' #ImWithSam campaign can provide some support. Ignoring should always be an active and strategic policy – regularly reviewed. Sometimes a 'charm offensive' works as an active way of 'ignoring' the situation.

No matter how tempting it is never meet offensive behaviour with more of the same. Find your good neighbours and consider a Neighbourhood Watch scheme, It is unlikely that you are the only target of the bad behaviour.

“There was some ‘silliness’ starting from teenagers across the street. A forthright support worker soon put paid to any possible problem.” Family consultant

“Phil has had mixed experience with different providers. In one case he was with a provider who rented houses in a cheap, rough area and the level of harassment was high: eggs thrown at their door, names called, windows sprayed with ‘spastics’ etc.”

You should help the person you support to understand his or her rights, and support them to use those rights. At the back of this guide you'll find an easy read section that will help.



9. Case study: Asserting Lucy's rights



“I supported Lucy for two years without any complaint. When we got a new neighbour, we shared her One Page Profile alongside a cover note containing all the information our new neighbours would need to understand what is happening in the property and who we are.

Unfortunately the new neighbours did not tolerate Lucy or the staff well at all. We even had to contact the police because the neighbour purposefully trapped a member of staff's arm in the car door whilst slamming it shut.

Sadly, we work in many areas where the local community is not accepting of the people we support. Not every community wants services in their neighbourhood.

In this case, after the new neighbour moved in, it didn't take long before we were receiving many more complaints, to the point that it was looking more and more like hate crime. The police really supported with this, and once they had spoken to the neighbourhood things settled.

Whilst I'm sure most of us really go over and above to try and build good positive relationships with the neighbours, there will always be people who make it their life's work to make things difficult and in that situation our job is to stand firm in asserting the human rights of the person we support, involving the police and other groups as needed.

There is an important role here for our family consultants. Someone who isn't connected to the situation is always going to provide balanced support and advice to all parties.” Locality Manager

10. Property values

Occasionally people complain that their property value is adversely affected by the service next door.

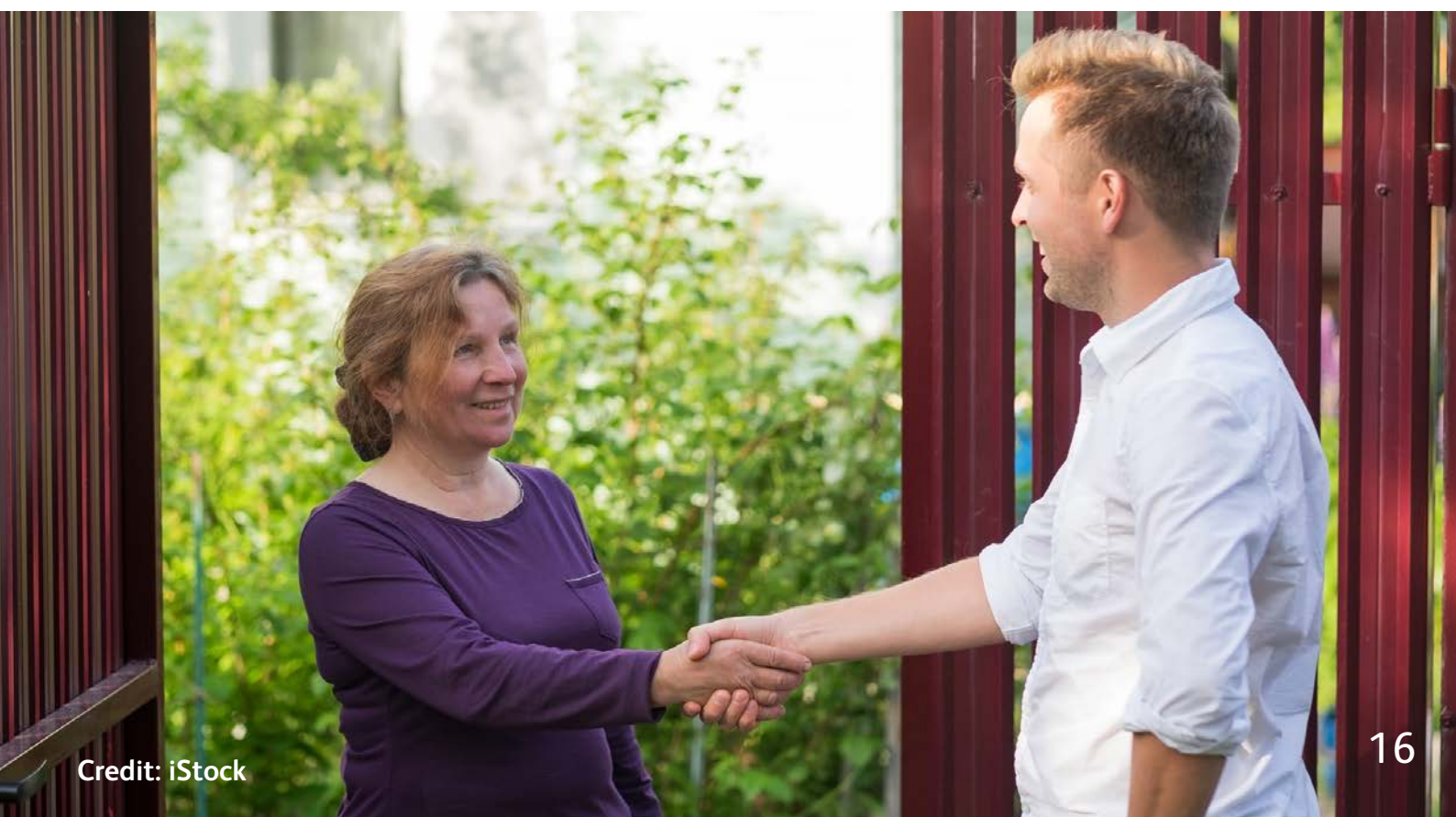
Ignore the temptation to retort.

This is almost always an indication that something else is wrong, and it gives you an opportunity to sit down for a coffee and a chat. What, specifically, is annoying the neighbour? It'll probably be one of the things in this guide.

You cannot force a neighbour to want to have a relationship with you or with the person you support. But you can make sure that they know you aim to be good neighbours, a positive influence on the local community, and responsive to any concerns.

“When Andrew moved in (to a home he owns) the neighbours were very reserved. We later found out that they had thought the house was being turned into a hostel. We never quite understood why. Don't let misunderstandings mushroom into problems. Talk to the neighbours.” Family Consultant

“We try to be ‘over the top’ good neighbours, being mindful of where we park as support staff and offering rapid response to disputes such as fences. Sometimes it is worth paying before any row escalates.” Operations Director



11. Case study: When a person's mental health declines



“When the person we support first moved into his own bungalow he was a happy man who would wave and smile to his neighbours, stop for a chat if he saw them and deliver them Christmas cards. The neighbours in turn would drop him Christmas and birthday cards and wave and say hello to him.

But following a decline in his mental health, the individual has begun to scream in and outside of his property, often shouting at the neighbours, banging on the fences and swearing.

To try and manage and keep his positive relationship with his neighbours I took myself to their house, introduced myself and with permission from his parents and social worker gave them a little insight into what was causing him to be and become upset. I also gave them my number and told them that they could call me at any time if they were worried or concerned.

The person we support was then sectioned. I again went to see the neighbours and explained that he had been sectioned due to the decline in his mental health. I wanted to keep them updated and know that he was getting some help.

When we were given a date that he would be returning home I again went and visited his neighbours to let them know that he would be returning home. I explained that he was getting help for his mental health and had a wide professional team around him to help and support.

I again assured them that they could call me if they had any worries or concerns.”
Locality Manager

12. Case study: “I didn’t want to complain. I just wanted to understand...”



Alex is an autistic man who needs very little sleep. Since childhood, he has only wanted about four hours’ sleep per night. He’s frequently awake for 48 hours straight. When awake, he needs 2:1 support.

He joined Dimensions from the family home, via a difficult transition that included short term accommodation.

It was quickly clear that the night time support agreed for Alex – one waking night and one sleep-in – was inadequate. The waking night staff member could only encourage Alex to go back to bed, and Alex would whack his window in frustration. He wanted to be up and about. This quickly led to complaints from the neighbour whose daughter was doing mock exams and also couldn’t sleep.

A solution was urgently needed, and was found by redirecting some Continuing Healthcare funding from activity support to an additional waking night staff member. Clearly this is not an ideal solution longer term but Alex would otherwise have been at risk of losing his tenancy.

The neighbour told us that “I didn’t want to complain. I just wanted to understand...” As soon as she knew what we were doing to mitigate the situation – not just the waking night but also soundproofing the window and working with the Behaviour Support Team to examine alternative approaches to improving Alex’s sleep patterns – she was contented.

“There was no contact with the neighbour before she complained,” says the locality manager, “those few conversations have made a huge difference.”



The rights of the
people we support



Your rights



If you are scared or worried by how your **neighbours** are behaving towards you, you can tell someone you trust.

Neighbours are people who live near you.



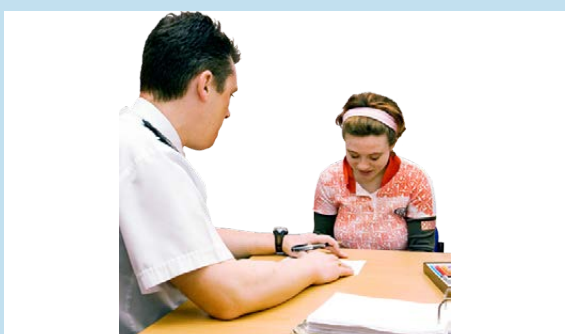
If you are scared or worried about how your **neighbours** are behaving towards you, you can talk to someone you trust.



You could tell a family member.



You could tell a support worker or a social worker.



If you think your neighbour has committed a **crime** then you can tell the police.

Crimes are when people break the law.



Crime can be things like

1. **Assault.** This is touching you when you do not want to be touched, hurting you or saying things that make you think they will hurt you



2. **Property damage.** This is breaking your things, throwing things at your home or graffiti.

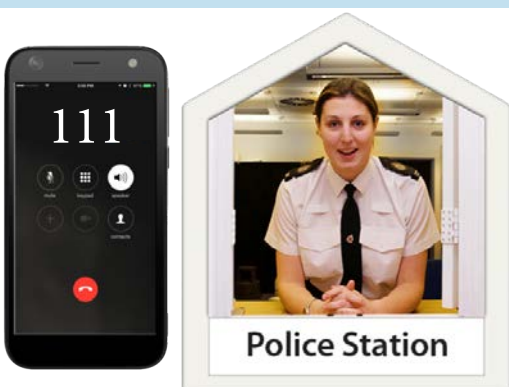


3. **Harassment** This is doing things that upset you again and again.



You can tell the police by calling 999 in an **emergency.**

An **emergency** means you or someone else might be hurt or harmed very soon.



You can tell the police by calling 111 if it is not an **emergency.**

You can also go to your local police station.



Hate Incidents



A **hate incident** is when you are treated badly because you have a disability.

It could be someone being unfriendly, aggressive or abusive to you.

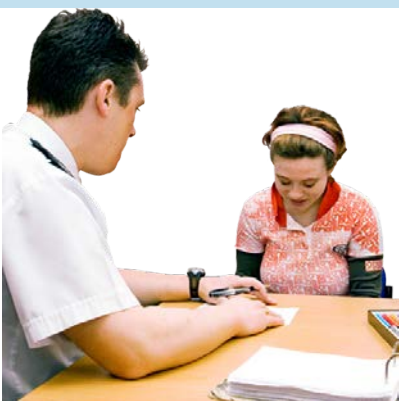


If you think you are being treated badly by your **neighbours** because you have a disability then this might be a **hate incident**.



You can report a **hate incident** to the police.

The police must take **hate incidents** seriously and must record all **hate incidents**.

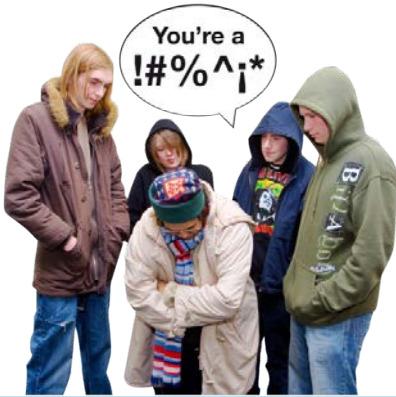


You should tell the police:

1. What happened



2. That you think your **neighbour** has treated you badly because of your disability.



3. Why you think your **neighbour** treated you badly because of your disability.

Did they say something about your disability?



4. Whether anything similar has happened before with the same **neighbour** or different **neighbours** at the same home



You might not think your **neighbour** treated you badly because of your disability but someone else you know does.



You should tell the police if someone else you know thinks you were treated badly because of your disability.



Hate Crimes

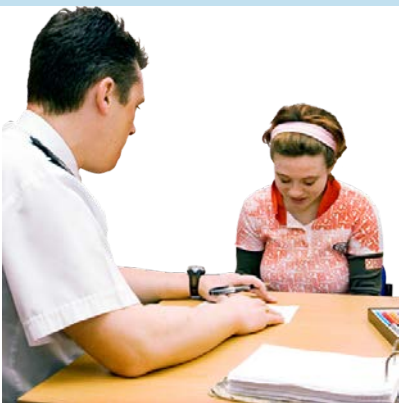


If you think your **neighbour** has committed a **crime** towards you because you have a disability then this might be a **hate crime**.



You can report a **hate crime** to the police.

The police must take **hate crime** seriously and must record and investigate **hate crimes**.

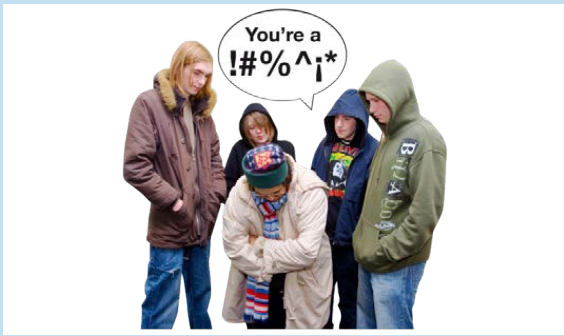


You should tell the police:

1. What happened



2. That you think your **neighbour** has committed a **crime** against you because of your disability.



3. Why you think your **neighbour** has committed a **crime** against you because of your disability.

Did they say something about your disability?



4. If anything similar has happened before with the same **neighbour** or different **neighbours** at the same home.



You might not think your **neighbour** committed a **crime** against you because you have a disability but someone else who knows you does.



The person who knows you can report the **hate crime** to the police.



If you are a victim of a **crime** you should get support.

Your local police force might offer you support.



You can also contact www.VictimSupport.org.uk



The Police



You might not want to report to the police because you are worried that this will make things worse.



You can talk to the police about what you want to happen. You can ask the police not to come to your home to speak to you.



You can ask the police to make a record of your report and not do anything else.



It is important the police make a record in case something happens again. This will help the police keep you safe.



If you are worried about reporting to the police you can speak to someone you trust.



You can also make an **anonymous** report on www.Report-It.org.uk. **Anonymous** means the police will not know that it was you who made the report.



Proving life can get better

Dimensions provides evidence-based, outcomes-focused support, including sector leading positive behaviour support, for people with learning disabilities, autism and complex needs. We help the people we support to be actively involved in their communities.



Find out more

Website: www.dimensions-uk.org

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Email: enquiries@dimensions-uk.org

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