

Neighbour Conflict Resolution Toolkit

A resource for practitioners preventing neighbour disputes from becoming anti-social behaviour.

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ASB HELP®

Your Voice Matters

In collaboration with



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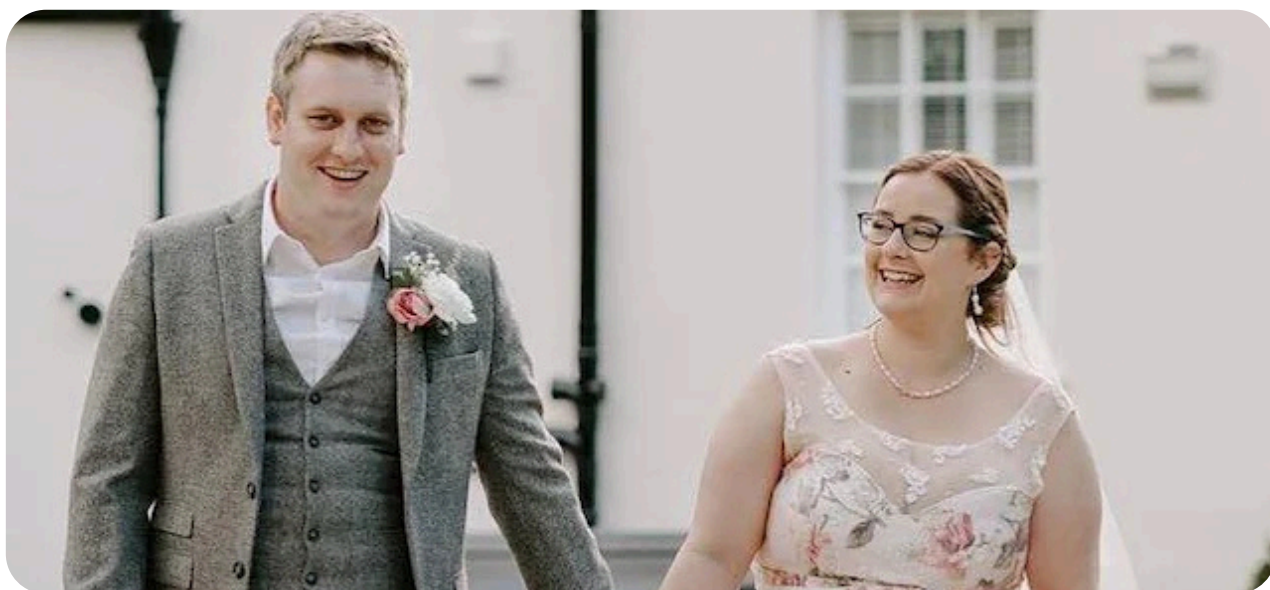


Introduction

Between August 2024 and August 2025, approximately 80% of enquiries to ASB Help were neighbour-related. Neighbour conflict and the potential for escalation to anti-social behaviour is often underestimated. These cases are often dismissed as 'low-level' or 'everyday' disagreements, yet these cases can be some of the most complex and high-risk that practitioners face. When concerns are not addressed early, or without clear communication and appropriate intervention, tensions can quickly escalate.

We have seen the devastating consequence of not intervening soon enough when in 2021, Stephen and Jennifer Chapple were murdered by their neighbour following an ongoing neighbour conflict over parking. This case highlighted serious failures in recognising risk and intervening early – demonstrating the need for practitioners to take neighbour conflict seriously and act decisively to prevent harm.

Therefore, we have designed this resource, in collaboration with [ADR Mediation](#), to support practitioners to recognise the seriousness of neighbour disputes, intervene proportionately and confidently, and use conflict-resolution approaches to de-escalate situations before harm occurs.



Stephen and Jennifer Chapple

Understanding neighbour conflict

Sometimes it can be difficult to define what is a neighbour conflict, what is anti-social behaviour and what is criminal behaviour. Needless to say - these categories can often overlap. So, below is a breakdown that shows how the three differ, while also recognising how they can overlap and escalate:

Knowing the difference

Neighbour conflict/dispute

Neighbour disputes typically involve mutual conflict between individuals often linked to disagreements over things like boundaries, noise or parking. The behaviour may be irritating or distressing but is not always intentional or targeted, and responsibility can sit on both sides. These cases often benefit from early intervention and mediation, as unresolved disputes can escalate into harassment or violence if left unmanaged.

Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour involves conduct that causes harassment, alarm or distress to others and is usually persistent or targeted. Unlike neighbour disputes, ASB is often one-sided, with a clear victim and perpetrator, and may include intimidation, noise nuisance, vandalism or drug-related activity. However, neighbour disputes can escalate to anti-social behaviour taking place on both sides.

Criminal behaviour

Criminal behaviour refers to actions that breach criminal law, such as assault, criminal damage, harassment or drug offences. Criminal behaviour can sit alongside anti-social behaviour or emerge from neighbour disputes.

Why knowing the difference matters

Understanding the differences helps practitioners respond proportionately and choose the right tools to address the situation. Misclassifying behaviour can delay intervention and increase risk - therefore making early assessment and ongoing monitoring of the situation critical.

Early warning signs of escalation

Neighbour disputes can escalate in different ways. From our experience, here are some of the common warning signs that a situation is escalating from neighbour conflict to anti-social behaviour:

- Increase in frequency or intensity of contact – e.g. repeated complaints, constant confrontation
- Use of intimidation – e.g. shouting, threatening language, staring
- Retaliatory behaviour – e.g. meeting noise nuisance with more noise nuisance
- Refusal to engage with informal resolution and/or mediation
- Early signs of harassment – e.g. repeated unwanted contact or monitoring, including using domestic CCTV to invade privacy

It's important to remember that escalation is often gradual, not sudden. Early warning signs are frequently present but overlooked or minimised. Regular risk assessments and taking victim concerns seriously are crucial to preventing harm and intervening before behaviour crosses into anti-social and/or criminal behaviour.



The impact of unresolved conflict

Unresolved conflict can have wide-ranging and serious consequences, particularly in neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour cases where people cannot easily remove themselves from the situation.

For individuals, ongoing conflict can lead to chronic stress, anxiety, sleep deprivation, depression and a loss of trust in services, with victims often changing their behaviour, withdrawing from their community or feeling unsafe in their own home. Over time, this can significantly impact physical health, employment, relationships and overall wellbeing.



For communities, unresolved conflict can weaken neighbour relationships and create an environment where anti-social or criminal behaviour is more likely to take hold. Tensions can have a ripple effect, drawing in family members or friends and increasing the risk of retaliation.

For services and practitioners, failure to resolve conflict early can result in case escalation and higher demand on enforcement and emergency responses. In the most serious cases, unresolved conflict can escalate into violence or life-changing incidents, highlighting the importance of early intervention.

As part of research for this resource, we have linked in with individuals who have experienced neighbour conflict to capture their experiences:

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“Nothing that was offered by agencies worked well because the agencies wanted to make it into a low-level tit for tat situation rather than the continual ASB, harassment and criminality that it was. By doing this they simply empowered the anti-social neighbours and made them think that the agencies were believing their false versions of events and made them feel that they could get away with, and continue what they were doing.

Because of this, things just got worse and worse due to increased harassment and a deeply seated hatred for us because we kept reporting all incidents and gathering evidence as per the request of all agencies. The only periods of peace were obtained by the police following positive court case outcomes (6 months asbo equivalents and restraining orders).

But the suffering, stress, effort and time involved in getting to those results was absolutely awful. Their housing association always had the option to seek orders in relation to their tenancy in order to apply significant pressure on them in relation to their behaviours, but they kept declining throughout the 5 years of issues.”

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“No help whatsoever from the local Communities Partnership - we have had to wait until the behaviour escalated to criminal damage, assault and stalking for any Police interest.”

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“The constant harassment and the antisocial behaviour led to myself needing mental health counselling, I lived in fear, my anxiety was bad to the point I didn't want to leave my home, and my blood pressure became significantly high. I also have physical disabilities.”

”



Reflective practice

Here are some reflective prompts practitioners can use when assessing and managing neighbour conflicts. They are designed to encourage a wider, harm-centred approach:

- Who may be affected beyond the main parties (children, older residents, visitors, nearby households)?
- How might this situation be impacting the mental health, safety or daily routines of those involved?
- What has changed over time - is the behaviour increasing in frequency and/or intensity?
- Are there opportunities for early intervention or de-escalation that have not yet been explored?
- What information might another agency hold that could change the risk picture?
- If no action is taken now, what could this look like in six months' time for those affected?

De-escalation principles for practitioners

We wanted to ensure that practitioners have some concrete principles to work from when attempting to de-escalate neighbour conflict. So, **ADR Mediation** have kindly provided some de-escalation principles rooted in mediative practices:

1. Stay neutral without minimising harm

Practitioners should maintain an impartial stance while still acknowledging the distress, frustration or fear that individuals may be experiencing.

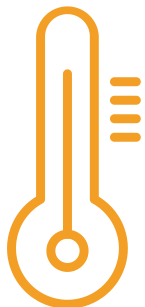
How practitioners use it:

- Use neutral, non-judgemental and validating language.
- Reflect back what you've heard without implying blame. *"You've felt disrespected"* rather than *"x has been disrespectful to you"*.
- Acknowledge impact: *"I can hear this has been really unsettling for you."*



2. Slow the pace of the interaction

Escalation in disputes often comes from increasing intensity such as repeated confrontations and/or retaliatory behaviour. Slowing the pace can immediately lower emotional temperature.



How practitioners use it:

- Encourage breaks, pauses and structured conversations - have a breakout room available if facilitating a discussion between parties.
- Reduce rapid back-and-forth exchanges that fuel friction and steer the focus onto impact and future outcomes rather than past and blame.
- Encourage reflection and thinking time, be ok with silence.



3. Focus on observable behaviour, not assumptions or intent

Move conversations away from assumptions and towards behaviour and impact. This reduces personal attacks and helps conversations stay constructive.

How practitioners use it:

- Ask: "What happened?" rather than "Why did they do that?"
- Anchor conversations on facts, impact and future focus and away from past and blame. Redirect emotional statements back to behaviour.
- Ask "What behaviour are you observing?". Interpretations of behaviour as disrespectful, bullying, toxic or unreasonable are harder to resolve than observable behaviours such as 'banging on the wall' or 'posting about me on Facebook'.



4. Listen for harm and risk, not just the 'story'

Conflicts escalate gradually, and warning signs are often present but overlooked.



How practitioners use it:

- Ask open questions about impact rather than just the events such as "what were you feeling at the time?", "how has that changed now?", "what's been the hardest thing for you?".
- Identify early signs of resistance, blame, harassment or intimidation.
- Treat emotions as data.

5. Set clear boundaries/expectations early

Ambiguity fuels anxiety and escalation.

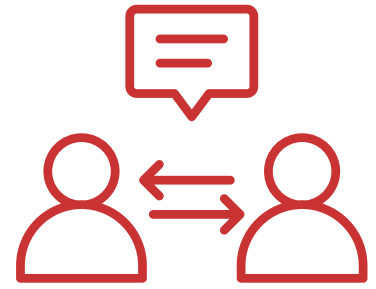
How practitioners use it:

- Provide honest clarity about the role and limits of the service.
- Explain processes, likely timescales and next steps.
- Review boundaries as risk increases.



6. Reinforce transparency and 'closing the loop'

Poor communication such as silence, vague updates and inconsistency between agencies heightens frustration and escalates conflict. Clear communication helps de-escalation.



How practitioners use it:

- Offer clear explanations of decisions and actions.
- Keep communication predictable and timely.
- Summarise agreements in writing where appropriate.

7. Encourage future-focused problem-solving

Neighbour disputes become entrenched when parties focus on past grievances. Redirecting to future behaviour and solutions shifts the conversation out of conflict.



How practitioners use it:

- Ask: "What would improve things for you going forward?"
- Explore environmental or behavioural solutions but use questions to draw out the solutions, don't provide them too quickly as this removes the power from the individual.
- Keep the focus on safety, wellbeing and practical change.

8. Provide space for emotional expression without letting emotion drive the process

Neighbour disputes are emotionally loaded and can spiral fast if handled poorly. Creating space for feelings while maintaining structure decreases escalation.



How practitioners use it:

- Allow time for people to express frustration or distress.
- Acknowledge feelings without taking sides.
- Re-anchor the conversation gently to behaviour, impact and future focus.



Language that de-escalates vs escalates conflict

The language that we use as practitioners has the power to escalate or de-escalate a situation. While developing our Practitioner's Communication Guide, victims of ASB told us first-hand how the words and approach taken by practitioners shaped their experience.

You can find our Practitioners Communication Guide [here](#), which also includes some useful guidance for you to reflect on.

In relation to neighbour conflict in particular, some of the common phrases individuals hear from practitioners include:

- "It's petty/low-level"
- "We can't do anything about this"
- "It's just a neighbour dispute"
- "It's tit-for-tat"
- "You're overreacting"
- "You're just as bad as each other"

We encourage practitioners to reflect on how language can influence a situation and to use the following prompts to support thoughtful, empathetic communication when engaging with individuals involved in neighbour disputes:

- How might the words I'm using be received by someone who is already distressed or frustrated?
- Does my language validate the person's experience, even if I can't take immediate action?
- Am I focusing solely on process, or am I acknowledging the harm and impact being described?
- If I were in their position, how would this response make me feel?

Other things to consider in managing neighbour disputes

We understand how complex neighbour disputes can be, and there can be multiple factors to consider when engaging with the parties involved. Alongside what we have already discussed, it is also important to consider the following.

Setting boundaries

Practitioners can set effective boundaries in neighbour disputes by being clear and honest about their role and its limits; while still acknowledging the impact the situation is having on those involved. Boundaries should be communicated early and framed around process rather than disbelief, with realistic expectations about what can happen next and when updates will be provided. Crucially, boundaries should be reviewed if risk or harm increases to prevent further harm.

Managing expectations

Clarifying expectations is a key part of managing neighbour disputes and preventing frustration. Practitioners should clearly explain what actions can be taken, what cannot, and the likely timescales involved, using plain and accessible language. Being upfront about processes and possible outcomes helps individuals feel informed rather than dismissed, even when immediate action isn't possible. Regularly revisiting and reinforcing expectations as a case develops can build trust and encourage engagement from all parties.

Keeping conversations focused on behaviour and impact

Keeping conversations focused on behaviour and impact helps practitioners move discussions away from blame and towards resolution. This involves encouraging individuals to describe what is happening, how often it occurs, and the effect it is having on their wellbeing, safety or daily life, rather than focusing on assumptions about intent or character of the other party involved. By consistently bringing conversations back to observable behaviour and real-world impact, practitioners can assess risk more effectively and ensure responses are harm-focused. This approach also helps all parties feel heard while keeping the discussion constructive and solution-focused.

What do victims of neighbour-related anti-social behaviour say?

"Listen actively to the tenant's concerns. Remain non-judgemental. Carry out investigation to gather information from both sides. Take their personal feelings out of their work by refraining from making assumptions about people without evidence of the fact i.e. an older person because they live alone must be senile etc. Carry out random visits in the neighbourhood so they can get some idea of what occurrences are taking place and monitor using questionnaire surveys to get feedback from tenants regularly."

"Listen to the victims, adopt a victim-centred approach, do not constantly provide excuses for the perpetrator and ignore the damage being done to the victims. Do not treat the victims as the problem because your workload is too much."

"Check records for the people and addresses concerned before attending - compare and contrast the current incident with any previous reports - any patterns?"

"Intervene at an early stage and not ignore the victim. Not allow it to escalate to the point of criminal activity."

"To believe the evidence of the victims and not try to put it down as two individuals as bad as each other."

Reflection and practice improvement

Post-case reflection

This guide is designed to encourage practitioners to reflect on their practice throughout the process of handling neighbour disputes. We believe that reflection is a key factor in professional development and ultimately improving community safety.

It is important to remember that reflection should not be used as a blame game. Reflective practice is a constructive process that supports learning and professional growth.

Therefore, we have created some post-case reflection prompts to consider, whether the case was a neighbour dispute or whether it escalated into anti-social and/or criminal behaviour:

- Did we intervene early enough, or were there missed opportunities to prevent escalation?
- How effectively did we identify and respond to the impact on those involved, particularly any vulnerabilities?
- Did our communication help de-escalate the situation, or were there moments where language may have increased tension?
- How well did partnership working function, and were the right agencies involved at the right time?
- How was risk assessed and reviewed as the situation developed?
- What worked well in resolving or managing the dispute, and what could have been done differently?
- Are there any learning points from this case that could inform future practice or policy?

Encouraging supervision and peer discussion

Supervision and peer discussion play a vital role in supporting practitioners working with neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour, particularly where cases are complex or emotionally challenging. It is important that these practices are embraced as they can provide a safe space to reflect on decisions and manage emotional impact.



Conclusion and other useful resources

Neighbour disputes are often underestimated, yet they can have a profound and lasting impact if left unaddressed. We hope this guide has supported you to reflect on your practice when managing neighbour conflict. Through considered, empathetic approaches we can support individuals, helping to create safer, more connected communities.

To support you further, we have compiled a list of useful resources for further reading:

Anti-social behaviour – landlord expectations – Housing Ombudsman:

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/centre-for-learning/key-topics/anti-social-behaviour-asb/expectations/>

General enforcement powers for ASB – College of Policing:

<https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/general-enforcement-powers-anti-social-behaviour>

Anti-social behaviour: guidance for professionals – Gov.uk:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/antisocial-behaviour-guidance-for-professionals>

Mediation myths blog – ASB Help:

<https://asbhelp.co.uk/the-truth-about-mediation/>

Resolving neighbour disputes – Gov.uk:

<https://www.gov.uk/how-to-resolve-neighbour-disputes>

Neighbour disputes guidance – Shelter:

https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/legal/housing_conditions/nuisance_and_asb/neighbour_disputes

A guide to civil mediation – Gov.uk:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/a-guide-to-civil-mediation>

Conflict resolution kit – Conflict Resolution Network:

<https://www.crnhq.org/cr-kit/>