

# **Defusing Neighbourhood Conflict and Antisocial Behaviour**

**Facilitator notes: two additional scenarios**



## Two additional defusing scenarios

These Facilitator Notes provide all the background information and discussion threads you need to use the two additional scenarios in your workshop (activity 4).

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Scenario Four – The Noisy Late Night Party p3

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### Scenario Four - The Noisy Late-Night Party

John is disgruntled when he discovers that there's a very loud party happening right next door. His neighbours at No.3 have invited a bunch of friends over, but the bash quickly spills into the corridor.



### Scenario Five - Domestic Violence in a Public Place

Things have been so tense and unpredictable for Paul and Karen lately that the violence could happen anywhere, at any time. As onlookers watch, Paul questions Karen on her recent shopping spree and gets angry when she answers back.



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## Scenario Four - The Noisy Late Night Party

### Step 1: Introduce the scenario

Read this description of the scenario out to the group:

John is disgruntled when he discovers that there's a very loud and disruptive party happening right next door. His neighbours at No.3 have invited a bunch of friends over, but the bash quickly spills into the corridor. Throughout the night, John makes several pleas to his neighbours to stop the party. But he doesn't quite get the outcome he's after...

### Step 2: Show the film

You may want to show the film a few times so that participants can understand what is going on.

### Step 3: 'What would you do?'

Ask the group these questions using whatever method you prefer and discuss their responses. Use the notes to help guide the discussion.

1. How would you react if your neighbours threw a party and lots of strangers were gathering outside your front door?	
a) I wouldn't want to get involved – I'd just ignore it.	As tough as it is to ignore loud music and party-goers, in most cases it might be safer to let things lie and approach the neighbour the next day, when an argument is less likely to escalate.
b) I'd knock on the door and ask if they could turn it down.	If you feel that it is safe to do so, approach the neighbour and explain that the music is too loud. Give a reason why – they may not have realised. Try to keep your emotions in check. Be prepared that they may not do what you want.
c) I'd be straight round there and give them a piece of my mind.	You are far less likely to get what you want if you approach the neighbours/group aggressively. It will only result in confrontation and could put you in serious danger.

## 2. How would you react if you found an intoxicated man asleep on your doorstep?

a) I'd politely ask my neighbours to move him and get help.	This is your best option. If you feel it is safe to do so, notify the neighbours that their friend has fallen asleep and should probably get home. They may want the same thing you do.
b) I'd call the police.	This option is only necessary if the neighbours can't move the man. The police will ask whether you have tried to intervene. Imagine how you'd feel if your neighbour called the police on you, before you'd had a chance to resolve the situation yourself.
c) I'd go round and demand that the party ends immediately – or else.	Approaching the neighbours/party-goers when you are angry is unlikely to resolve the situation. You may end up in a direct confrontation when all you wanted was the man to get home safely. Keep your emotions in check.

## 3. How would you react if a neighbour asked you to turn your party music down?

a) I'd apologise for the noise and tell them not to worry.	Try to be considerate of your neighbours. If they have young children who are trying to sleep or they start work early the next day, imagine how tired and frustrated they must be feeling. Try to come to a compromise and make them feel like they are being listened to.
b) I'd just laugh at them.	This is not an option. However intoxicated or frustrated you may be, try to put yourself in their shoes. Laughing at or mocking the neighbour will influence their behaviour. And remember, you still have to live next door to them.
c) I'd tell them to get out of my face right now and show them I meant it.	Your aggression is likely to be met with aggression, fuelling a confrontation. Are they likely to turn the music down if you're rude to them? No. Think before you speak.

**Step 4: 'What makes this situation worse?'**

Organise the participants into smaller groups and show the film again. Ask each group to identify the behaviours that cause the situation to escalate. Discuss each group's thoughts, recording their ideas on a flip chart.

They may notice the following behaviours...

- John is annoyed to open his front door and see three people drinking in his communal hallway.
- John picks up an empty beer bottle, which has been left on his doormat, and gestures to the party-goers to get rid of it.
- John decides to confront his neighbours.
- The party doesn't look to have quietened down.
- John knocks at the door then pushes the guy who answers.
- Another man joins the fight, leaving John outnumbered.

**Step 5: 'What could have make this situation better?'**

Give each group a set of 'Defusing tips' cards. Ask the groups to choose five that would have helped to resolve the situation and why. Discuss each group's ideas and highlight the common themes.

**Step 6: What the expert thinks**

Play to the group the audio clip of Dfuse's expert talking about this scenario. After listening, it might be helpful to then revisit the group's thoughts and compare their ideas.

## Frequently asked questions

### **How should I approach a group of drunk party-goers? Is it a wise move?**

If you feel that it is safe enough to do so, it is fine to approach the neighbour/party-goers. Just think carefully about what you are going to say first, and how you are going to say it. Keep your emotions in check and give a reason alongside your request. Be prepared that they might not be in the best state to have a conversation.

### **Should I just call the police when the music is too loud?**

Everyone is entitled to have a party in their own home, and there may not even be a disagreement here – the neighbours simply may not have realised that the music was too loud, or that their friend was asleep on your doorstep. Without any apparent criminality (drugs, violence) there is very little that the police can do, other than ask them to keep the noise down. You might want to think about the impact of escalating the issue to the police on your relationship with your neighbour.

### **What if the noise is ongoing?**

If you are suffering from noisy neighbours, the local Council's Environmental Health Department should be able to help. They will encourage you first to resolve the issue with your neighbour informally. If this is unsuccessful, make a diary of the type, time and duration of the noise and then make the call. They will try to informally resolve the issue on your behalf, but if this is unsuccessful they may progress to legal action.

### **Is it okay to approach someone when I'm at home on my own?**

If you know the neighbour, it is more likely that you will feel comfortable approaching them. Assess the situation first using your defusing skills, and if you feel as though you might be in danger, call the police. It is likely that there will be people who you don't know at the party, so if you do decide to approach, remember to assess the risks.

### **What should I do when a neighbour is constantly banging on my door and won't go away?**

Try to put yourself in their shoes. They might be incredibly frustrated. Are they trying to sleep or trying to get a young child to sleep? Listen to what they have to say and keep them talking, then try to reach a compromise. A person is more likely to calm down or leave you alone if they feel they have been listened to and that their request has been acknowledged.

**What can I do about drinking in my communal hallway?**

If you are outnumbered, it's unlikely you'll achieve your desired outcome, which may be to move the entire party inside. If you can, consider resolving the situation the next morning, or on another day after consulting your housing guidebook/rules, or speaking to your housing provider (if applicable).

**What should I do if I find someone passed out from excessive alcohol use in my hallway?**

Try to wake them up, check that they are okay. Then notify the neighbour whose party they attended. They may not have even realised their friend was missing. If they refuse to respond or help them, or you cannot get through to them, call the police.

## Scenario Five - Domestic Violence in a Public Place

### Step 1: Introduce the scenario

Read this description of the scenario out to the group:

Paul and Karen have a rocky relationship, but things have been so tense and unpredictable lately, that the violence could happen anywhere, at any time. As onlookers watch, Paul questions Karen on her recent shopping spree and gets angry when she answers back. Things quickly turn nasty...

### Step 2: Show the film

You may want to show the film a few times so that participants can understand what is going on.

### Step 3: 'What would you do?'

Ask the group these questions using whatever method you prefer and discuss their responses. Use the notes to help guide the discussion.

1. If you saw this behaviour in a local car park, what would you do about it?	
a) I wouldn't get involved.	While it may seem like the easiest option, try to help if you can. Think about the consequences of this conflict. You might be able to prevent Karen from getting hurt.
b) I'd do something to help.	You can intervene safely, it simply depends on your approach. Use defusing skills and methods to attempt to stop Paul, without getting yourself hurt.
c) I'd call the police.	Time is of the essence here. While it is necessary to call the police, Karen could get hurt while you're waiting for them to arrive. Consider stopping the conflict from escalating as much as you can in the meantime.

2. If you chose to do something to help, would you...	
a) Ask Karen if she is okay from a distance?	A simple 'Hey, are you okay?' could be all that is needed to get Paul to stop. Keep your distance if you don't feel safe and be aware of your surroundings.
b) Shout at Paul to stop from a distance?	Think about what you're going to say. This could be normal behaviour for the pair, which means that Karen could defend Paul and turn on you. Choose your language carefully.
c) Intervene physically by trying to separate them, or trying to restrain Paul?	This could be dangerous for all involved. The conflict could escalate into a confrontation between all three people.

3. What do you think of Paul's behaviour?	
a) It's none of my business.	How would you feel if it was your daughter or sister? Would it be your business to turn a blind eye then?
b) It's totally unacceptable.	Paul's behaviour IS unacceptable, and when he grabs her, it becomes assault. Consider that if when you are undecided as to whether to help.
c) It's a police matter – Paul should be arrested for that.	It is a matter for the police, but you can help – either by shouting, intervening, filming, or simply taking down the details.

#### Step 4: 'What makes this situation worse?'

Organise the participants into smaller groups and show the film again. Ask each group to identify the behaviours that cause the situation to escalate. Discuss each group's thoughts, recording their ideas on a flip chart.

They may notice the following behaviours...

- Paul approaches Karen and swears at her in an aggressive tone.
- Karen tells Paul 'not to start'.
- Paul pushes Karen back, points into the car and demands to know what she has bought.
- Karen tells Paul that's its nothing to do with him and to leave her alone.
- Paul grabs Karen by her jacket and pushes her backwards between the cars.

**Step 5: 'What could have made this situation better?'**

Give each group a set of 'Defusing tips' cards. Ask the groups to choose five that would have helped to resolve the situation – from the point of view of the onlooker (not Karen and Paul) – and why. Discuss each group's ideas and highlight the common themes.

Keep in mind that domestic situations like this can illicit strong emotions, so manage the discussion carefully and sensitively. Keep comments neutral and non-judgmental and at no point suggest that Paul's actions are justifiable – they are not, no matter how much he may have been provoked leading up to this point.

We first see this situation when it has already reached high levels of emotion and we don't know what may have gone on before. Is a single event or a pattern of abuse? Are the couple are having a bad day? They may have a long and mainly loving or good relationship.

Paul does appear to be assaulting Karen and therefore bystanders are perfectly within their right to take reasonable and necessary action if they believe that Karen is in immediate danger. However a great deal of 'embarrassment' can be caused when an altercation like this goes beyond the family unit. Karen may even feel that this situation is not a 'problem' and that she can deal with Paul's outbursts herself. In this case an intervention by an outsider may not be welcomed and Karen may even turn on the 'rescuer'.

The key here is we don't know. We don't know why this is happening. We don't know how Karen and Paul feel about the situation. We don't know how they will respond to an outsider. But to do nothing may lead to serious injury and potentially a continued pattern of domestic violence. Approach this situation with caution. Think about your own personal safety. Shout from a distance, like the lady in the clip, using the parked cars for cover and see what they do next before committing yourself to an action.

**Step 6: What the expert thinks**

Play to the group the audio clip of Dfuse's expert talking about this scenario. After listening, it might be helpful to then revisit the group's thoughts and compare their ideas.

## Frequently asked questions

### **If I see or suspect that domestic violence is taking place, what should I do?**

Violence in a domestic context is common, but it definitely shouldn't be ignored. That said, it often requires careful handling by specialists. Consider keeping a diary of what you have seen or heard, and only react or intervene if someone is in real danger and ONLY if it is safe to do so. Report your concerns to the police at the earliest opportunity. Don't just assume that someone else will do it.

### **Who could I call in such a situation?**

Contact your local police in confidence. Most councils and housing associations have special departments that register and deal with suspected domestic violence incidents, in partnership with the police. So take comfort in the fact that your report will be in safe hands.

### **What will happen if I report a neighbour but they realise it was me who made the call?**

Any report you make should be treated as confidential. It is unlikely that the authorities would disclose where the information came from. If they do jump to conclusions, you could deny it or take the opportunity to express your concern for their safety.

### **Should I ever report a heated conversation I overhear, for instance over a garden fence? Or do I need to see the threat, rather than just hear it?**

Most couples argue. Think about what they are saying – is there any mention of previous violence or threats being made? Are you concerned that it could escalate? If so – report it.

### **What if a child is the victim of the abuse?**

Where there is a concern about a child's safety, the law says we must protect that child. Call the local Council child protection line or contact the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000. Even if you only have a small concern about a child's safety – report it. It may be that others have already reported their concerns and you can help build a clearer picture of that child's situation.

### **What should I do if this type of thing is happening to me?**

Don't accept it or believe that it is partially your fault, even if someone tells you it may be. In the first instance, try to use defusing techniques to stop the arguments from escalating and getting physical. Then contact the Police via the Domestic Violence National Helpline on 0808 2000 247 (or 808 2000 247 from a mobile phone)