

## Managing Challenging Behaviour

### **What do we mean by challenging behaviour?**

VPC's distinctive method encourages leaders to work together in small groups, and to engage in local self-government and decision-making. Such a collaborative method means leaders can sometimes come across instances of challenging behaviour displayed by adults.

Challenging behaviour is conduct we find unacceptable in some way. Behaviour becomes unacceptable when it hurts or undermines others. Or, it is socially inappropriate in a damaging way to other people, or to a project (within VPC s or otherwise), regardless of intention.

It could be behaviour that is not in line with our Code of Conduct. Those with leading and managing people roles in VPC may have to manage situations involving challenging behaviour.

Sometimes, such conduct will be a barrier to the commitment to a common standard. It can prevent leaders from working together effectively to deliver excellent leadership to young cadets. It may also affect other people and go against the values of the VPC.

Caring for the individual is central to the management of challenging behaviour. This applies in three ways:

1. **Caring for the individual who has been hurt by challenging behaviour.** We have a responsibility to make every effort to safeguard ALL from physical, sexual and emotional harm while participating in activities.
2. **Caring for the individual who has displayed the behaviour.** Whatever the cause of challenging behaviour, the focus should not be the behaviour itself. Instead, it must be on care for the individuals involved and everyone's positive role to play. While it is important to manage the behaviour, the person behind it should never be disregarded, as we have a duty of care.
3. **Caring for yourself as an individual.** It is impossible to look at challenging behaviour without considering the person dealing with it and their personal responses. Everyone has particular issues or feelings about some people that will make them react suddenly and emotionally. Be aware of how your own personal responses will affect the way in which you approach an incident of challenging behaviour. Ensure you have support to manage any situation.

### **Challenging behaviour may take the form of:**

- Verbal abuse
- Sarcasm
- Intimidation
- Inappropriate body language
- Bad language
- Language that can undermine people's self-esteem
- Silence, actively ignoring people, or disengagement
- Abuse or inappropriate comments through email or social media

### **Who is involved?**

Challenging behaviour may be shown by and/or affect:

- Young Cadets
- Other adult volunteers
- Parents/carers of young cadets
- Family members
- Colleagues

### **What are the effects of challenging behaviour?**

Short-term effects can include:

- Leaders, or other people, being hurt physically or emotionally
- Lack of progress on events, projects or developments within the unit
- Disruption to events and meetings
- Damage to relationships between leaders and/or Cadets

### **Long-term effects can include:**

- Volunteers or leaders leaving
- Lack of growth in units or areas
- Low motivation within teams and areas
- Lack of innovation and positive change within local areas
- Damage to VPC's reputation, locally and nationally.

### **Why does challenging behaviour occur?**

Challenging behaviour can occur as a result of a wide range of issues, many of which you have no control over. Within the VPC context, challenging behaviour could result from:

- A clash of personalities
- Lack of sensitivity or understanding from other leaders
- Bullying from another leader
- A leader feeling unable to manage all the responsibilities in their role
- Poor support or management from other adult leaders

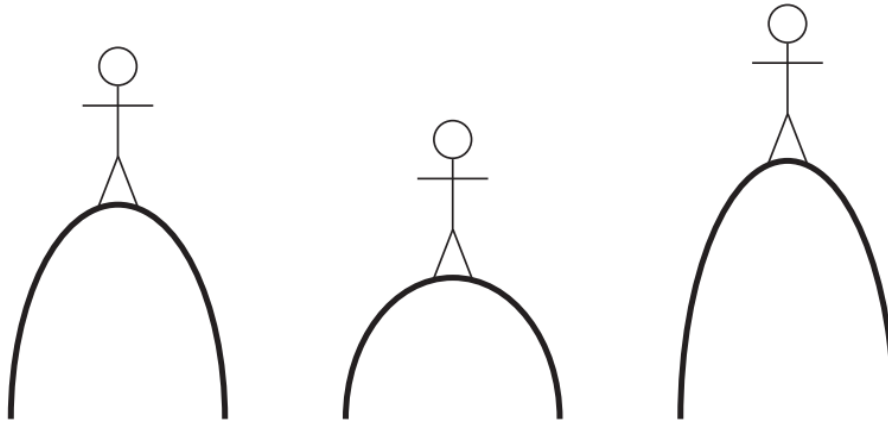
### **External reasons why any adult's behaviour might become challenging can include:**

- Something that happened before the meeting or event
- Problems brought from home or the workplace
- Bullying or abuse outside of VPC
- A medical condition (diabetics or mental health) or personal situation affecting them or someone close to them
- Difficulty understanding other people's points of view e.g. undiagnosed autism
- Tension between VPC leaders and police Officers, lack of understanding around roles and responsibilities

Finding out the cause beyond the immediate issue, while being sensitive to other people's privacy, can often help you to support the leader and other people involved.

In an ideal world, challenging behaviour would not be exhibited by any adults involved in the VPC. However, circumstances, or the thoughts or feelings someone experiences, may lead to them behaving in an unacceptable way. The reasons behind challenging behaviour are often outside anyone else's control. However, there are ways to prevent challenging behaviour. One example is by being supportive to other leaders and creating an environment that fosters positive attitudes. Important ways of doing this include, keeping open channels of communication and setting an example with your own behaviour

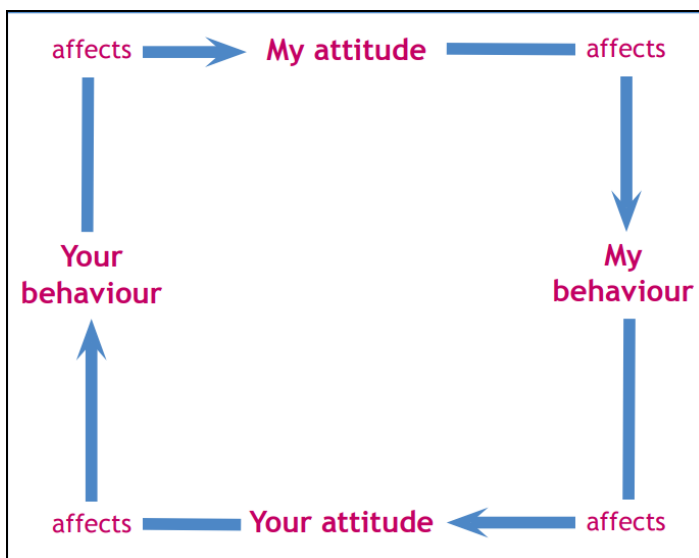
### Understanding different perspectives



A good activity to support leaders ‘get to know each other’ is as follows:  
 Using a flip chart draw three mounds or small hills on the paper, then draw a stick person on the top of each one. All three mounds should be a different height (like in the drawing above). Explain that each person is totally unique and is made up of complex interactions, such as their life experiences, culture, faith, education, etc.

Ask the group to shout out other ‘things’ that make us who we are and record them on the flip chart within the mound. Now, return to the stick figures and explain that we all interact within communities from different starting points. And, what makes us good at managing behaviours is when we can see how we are influenced by who we are and what has ‘made us’ who we are.

One tool you can use after doing this activity is to talk about Batari’s Window – see below



Starting at MY behaviour, talk through in a group how 'you' are part of the challenging behaviour if you don't get control of your emotions.

### **Top tips for preventing challenging behaviour**

- Ensure that everyone knows what they are expected to do. If leaders don't know what is expected of them, they can be unhappy when they are asked to do things they have not anticipated.
- Be clear what the roles and responsibilities for the leadership team
- Remind leaders of the Code of Conduct and its expectations – perhaps have a session each term
- Make it clear that people can raise issues, either with an appointed lead or in team briefs, to prevent build up. Ensure all leaders know when and how to make contact and encourage them to do so.
- Be aware of when others feel overwhelmed or burnt out. Some leaders have multiple roles and responsibilities within, and outside, VPC, which can take its toll on their wellbeing. Show awareness of how others are feeling. For example, talk through a difficult situation that a leader has had to manage. This includes the behaviour of a cadet or a complaint from a parent/carer.
- Build in time for celebrating successes of leaders and the unit, as may help people feel appreciated.
- Find the right role for the right person Sometimes, leaders take on tasks or roles before they fully realise the time involved, or for which they find they do not have the skills. This can result in a stressful experience. When recruiting people for tasks or roles, think about whether they have the necessary skills, experience, support, time and enthusiasm. If not, is there a different role that they would be happier doing? Suitability for a role may change due to a leader's external circumstances, so roles should be reviewed regularly.

### **When adults in VPC display challenging behaviour, consider these points:**

What is the problem with this behaviour?

What are the effects of this behaviour on other people and on VPC?

What do I want to happen?

What approach will work best, with this individual, to enable this to happen?

Am I the best person to respond to this behaviour?

Depending on the situation, a conversation about a leader's behaviour is often the first step. Sometimes, this may be a quick reminder of what you need a leader to do and asking whether there is anything they would like to talk to you about. At other times, you will need a longer conversation about why the behaviour is unacceptable and what lies behind it. An important skill for someone in a leadership and management role is knowing how to act to manage challenging behaviour.

The best way to manage challenging behaviour is to use the technique of Active Listening and planning to move on:



1. **Active listening** - In conversation, it is vital that you listen properly and find out what the world looks like from the other person's point of view. This helps you understand the reasons for their behaviour and how you can support them, so it doesn't happen again. Top tips with active listening are:
  - **Time** - Give the other person time to form sentences about how they are feeling and to express themselves.
  - **Don't be afraid of silence** - Sometimes, people need time to process and order their thoughts, especially when upset about something.
  - **Don't interrupt** – Try and take the time to active listen and not to jump in before they have had their say.
  - **Concentration** - Concentrate on what the other person is telling you and ignore the narrative inside your own head. Try to avoid immediately linking what you are hearing to your own experiences, feelings and opinions.
  - **Non-verbal cues** - Pay attention to the other person's non-verbal communication, and what that tells you about their feelings and experiences. Use your own non-verbal communication to encourage the other person (for example, leaning forward, smiling, nodding, and making positive eye contact).
  - **Use Open questions** - Encourage the other person to express themselves further by asking open questions (for example, 'How did you feel about this?').
  - **Reflection** - Respond to the other person by summarising what you have heard them telling you. This can help them understand their own feelings and actions, and they can correct you if you have misunderstood.
  - **Difference** - Be aware that people have different backgrounds and abilities. A person may need more or less time to think about what they want to say or might use different words.

## 2. Moving On

After an incident, relationships between leaders might be damaged, people could be feeling hurt, and it can seem difficult to move on as a team in the future. Top tips for moving on:

- **Communicate what has happened and move on** - Ensure all the adults involved in the incident know the outcomes and learning. Discuss them all together, or by meeting individuals. Make it clear that once this particular incident has been closed, it will not be discussed further.
- **Celebrate success** - Continue to highlight good practice. This will help other leaders feel appreciated, despite any difficult situations that may have happened.
- **Change the leadership team** – ask other units to bring in new ideas and ways of working.
- **Use personal reflection** - Thinking about how you feel about a difficult situation with another adult, and acknowledging any feelings of hurt or disappointment, can help you move on from the situation.
- **Use support networks** - Managing an incident of challenging behaviour can be a really stressful time. Use your own support networks within, and outside, cadets to support you, such as friends and family.
- **Be positive** - Keep team communications positive and look forward to what you are going to achieve in the future.
- **Lead by example** As a leader, it is important that you show the behaviour you wish to see in the team. For example, don't hold grudges, but, instead, make efforts to rebuild damaged relationships

