



Volunteers

Tips for helping clients in difficult situations



As a volunteer with the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP), some of your clients may experience stress and anxiety over their taxes. Some clients may be paying tax to the CRA for the first time. Here are some tips to help in these situations.

Communication strategies

Active listening

- ☐ Ask questions to get the complete picture
- ☐ Take notes
- ☐ Make sure you understand the client by rephrasing their concerns back to them. For example, “To make sure I understand correctly, you want to know...”

Empathetic listening

- ☐ Find out how the client feels
- ☐ Respond to the client’s emotions
- ☐ Express concern about the circumstances

Speaking skills

- ☐ **Tone of voice** – Tone can reflect your attitude, state of mind, or confidence level
- ☐ **Emphasis** – The weight we put on a particular word or phrase can greatly affect the message we send
- ☐ **Rate of speech** – Speaking too fast while explaining tax information may result in the client having difficulty understanding

Things to keep in mind

If a client seems upset or aggressive, it is likely due to their situation and not with the service you’re providing. Try to stay calm and defuse the situation by using the following strategies:

- ☐ Ignore the emotional attack and ask questions or make objective statements about the problem
- ☐ Try to remember the client is not angry at you personally
- ☐ Validate the client if they’re right, but focus on what must be done
- ☐ Be neutral; focus on the problem, not the person
- ☐ Establish communication terms and boundaries (no yelling, swearing, personal attacks, etc.)
- ☐ Remind the client your role is to help

As a volunteer, you should not tolerate abuse. If a client becomes abusive, please inform them their session will end if the behaviour continues.

Take care of yourself – If you feel overwhelmed, reach out to your CVITP coordinator for guidance.