

CONFLICT, COMPLAINTS & WELLBEING IN STRATA

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1. Overview

What this guide covers

This guide provides practical guidance for managing conflict, complaints and wellbeing in strata communities.

It focuses on:

- why conflict occurs in strata
- how complaints can be raised and managed more effectively
- how communication impacts outcomes
- how to respond to difficult or emotional interactions
- when behaviour becomes unreasonable
- how to protect wellbeing while dealing with ongoing issues

Why it matters to owners corporations

Strata living and management involve shared:

- spaces
- costs
- decisions
- expectations

This naturally creates friction. However, many strata disputes escalate not because of the original issue, but because of how the issue is communicated and managed.

Poor handling of complaints can lead to:

- unnecessary conflict
- delays and inefficiency
- strained relationships
- burnout for committees and managers
- ongoing stress for residents

Good communication and clear processes can significantly reduce escalation and improve outcomes.

Who should read this

- Residents
- Committee Members
- Strata Managers

Scope of this Guide

This guide focuses on practical communication, conflict management and wellbeing in strata communities. It does not replace legal advice, mediation, emergency services or formal dispute processes.

2. Legislative Framework

Relevant Victorian Framework

- Owners Corporations Act 2006 (Vic)
- Owners Corporations Regulations 2018 (Vic)
- internal complaint and grievance processes
- dispute pathways such as DSCV and VCAT

Key Practical Responsibilities

Owners corporations should:

- provide clear complaint pathways
- respond to concerns appropriately
- document decisions and actions
- maintain respectful communication standards

In general:

- issues should be raised through the owners corporation process
- complaints should be considered and responded to
- unresolved matters may proceed to formal pathways

Importantly:

- strata managers generally act on instructions from the owners corporation
- many decisions require committee or owners corporation approval

Glossary of Terms

Conflict

Disagreement or tension between parties

Complaint

A formally raised concern

Escalation

When a situation becomes more intense or serious or requires referral to a higher authority such as the committee, manager or formal dispute process

Boundary

A limit around acceptable behaviour or communication

Formal process

Structured pathway for resolving disputes

3. Common Issues

Common triggers in strata

- noise
- parking
- pets
- repairs and maintenance
- levies and costs
- rule breaches
- communication delays
- neighbour behaviour

Why conflict escalates

Conflict often builds when people feel:

- ignored
- unheard
- disrespected
- unclear about process
- forced to repeat themselves

Communication patterns that make things worse

- emotional or accusatory emails
- long back-and-forth arguments
- personal attacks
- copying in multiple parties unnecessarily
- responding while frustrated

When behaviour crosses the line

Some behaviour is no longer simply “difficult”.

Examples may include:

- verbal abuse
- intimidation
- threats
- harassment
- discriminatory comments
- excessive or repeated contact after boundaries have been set

At this point, the issue may require:

- documentation
- boundary-setting
- escalation
- formal or safety responses

4. Best Practice Approach

Focus on the issue, not the person

Shift from “Who is at fault?” to “What needs to be resolved?”

Shared-interest framing often reduces unnecessary conflict and helps maintain a focus on practical outcomes.

Acknowledge emotion without escalating

People are more likely to engage productively when they feel heard.

This does not mean agreeing with the complaint or behaviour. It means acknowledging the person's frustration or experience while keeping the discussion focused on process and resolution.

Helpful approaches include:

- acknowledging the impact the issue may be having
- recognising frustration without becoming defensive
- focusing on next steps rather than blame

Use clear, structured communication

A simple format often works best:

Issue → Impact → Request

For example: "There has been repeated late-night noise from Lot X over the past week, which has affected sleep. Could you please advise the appropriate next step under the owners corporation process?"

Use neutral and non-blaming language

Effective communication is:

- clear
- brief
- factual
- respectful

Avoid:

- emotional or accusatory wording
- personal criticism
- escalating tone

Where possible, communication should be written with the understanding that it may later be reviewed as part of a formal process. Shorter is often better.

Clarify process and expectations

Conflict often escalates when people do not understand:

- the process
- timing
- responsibilities
- next steps

Helpful communication may include:

- expected timeframes
- whether committee approval is required
- what information is still needed
- what the next stage of the process will be

Slow things down

If emotions are high:

- pause before responding
- avoid reactive communication
- do not respond while angry or frustrated

Don't engage in escalation

Avoid:

- matching tone
- arguing every point
- trying to "win" the interaction

The goal is usually resolution, not victory.

Set boundaries where needed

You can be respectful while still setting boundaries.

Examples include:

- "Communication must remain respectful."
- "This matter will follow the owners corporation process."
- "Repeated communication will not change the outcome."

Where communication becomes excessive or unreasonable, the owners corporation may implement reasonable communication protocols, including:

- limiting communication frequency
- requiring communication through the strata manager
- providing consolidated responses within defined timeframes

Any such approach should be:

- reasonable
- proportionate
- consistently applied
- documented where appropriate

Move to formal pathways when needed

Formal processes may be appropriate where:

- issues are ongoing
- communication is unproductive
- behaviour becomes unreasonable
- evidence is required
- safety or wellbeing concerns arise

Keep clear records

Good record-keeping supports:

- consistency
- accountability
- dispute resolution
- risk management

Helpful practices include:

- confirming important discussions in writing
- keeping dated file notes
- documenting decisions and actions
- maintaining copies of relevant correspondence

Clear records can help reduce misunderstandings and support formal processes if disputes escalate.

Protect your wellbeing

If conflict is ongoing:

- step back where possible
- avoid constant engagement
- use process instead of personal back-and-forth
- seek support early if needed

Helpful Communication Approaches

Instead of...	Consider...
"Calm down."	"I understand this situation is frustrating."
"That's not our problem."	"This matter will need to follow the owners corporation process."
"You already emailed about this."	"Your concerns have been noted and are currently being considered."
"There's nothing more we can do."	"The next available step may be the formal dispute process."

5. Manager / Committee Guidance

Before responding, consider:

What type of issue is this?

- complaint
- conflict
- rule breach
- misunderstanding
- behaviour issue

What outcome is needed?

- clarify the issue
- resolve the problem
- de-escalate the conflict or intensity
- document
- escalate the matter to the committee, grievance committee or external body

Is the response proportionate?

Consider:

- minor issue vs ongoing problem
- informal vs formal response

Any communication protocols must be reasonable, proportionate and communicated.

Are we staying within our role?

Avoid:

- taking sides emotionally
- becoming personally involved
- reacting impulsively

Are expectations and process clear?

Consider:

- has the process been explained clearly?
- has the expected timeframe been communicated?
- does the response remain factual and proportionate?

Is behaviour appropriate?

If not:

- set and communicate boundaries
- document behaviour
- escalate where required

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What should I do if I have a problem with another resident or neighbour?

If the issue is minor and it feels safe to do so, it may be appropriate to raise it calmly and respectfully first.

However, if the issue is repeated, sensitive or likely to escalate, it is usually better to raise it through the appropriate owners corporation or strata process rather than confronting the person directly.

Q. What is the best way to respond to an emotional or angry complaint?

It is usually best to:

- acknowledge the concern calmly
- avoid responding emotionally
- focus on process and next steps
- keep communication brief and factual
- avoid escalating the tone

In many situations, slowing communication down and moving the matter into a more structured process can help reduce conflict.

Q. What if another resident keeps making complaints about me?

If complaints are being made repeatedly, it is important not to respond emotionally or defensively.

Instead:

- ask what the actual concern is
- check whether the complaint relates to a rule, behaviour or misunderstanding
- keep records of communication
- respond calmly and factually
- use the formal process if the issue becomes unreasonable

Q. What if I feel like my complaint is not being taken seriously?

Before escalating, it is helpful to check:

- whether the complaint has been raised through the correct process
- whether enough factual detail has been provided
- whether the issue is something the owners corporation can act on
- whether a response or decision is still pending

Q. Should I keep sending follow-up emails if I'm not getting the outcome I want?

Not always. Repeated emotional or repetitive emails often make a situation harder to manage. A better approach is usually to:

- send one clear summary
- ask for the next step or expected timeframe
- keep records
- use the formal process if needed

Q. How do I know whether an issue is just frustrating or actually unreasonable behaviour?

Behaviour may be crossing the line if it involves:

- personal attacks
- repeated harassment
- verbal abuse
- threats or intimidation
- discriminatory comments
- excessive or obsessive contact after boundaries have been set

Q. What should committee members or strata managers do if someone becomes angry or aggressive?

The priority should be to remain calm and avoid escalating the interaction.

Helpful steps may include:

- keeping communication brief and factual
- not responding in the same tone
- ending the interaction if it becomes abusive
- documenting what occurred
- escalating internally or formally if needed

If there is any immediate safety risk, call 000.

Owners corporations make decisions and managers implement them. Managers should avoid making discretionary decisions unless expressly authorised.

Q. What if a strata issue is affecting my stress levels or wellbeing?

That is more common than many people realise, particularly where conflict has continued over time. It may help to:

- take breaks from the issue where possible
- avoid repeatedly checking or responding to messages
- move the issue into a formal process
- seek support early if needed

7. Emerging Issues and Future Considerations

Higher density living

More shared living environments create more interaction and therefore more potential for conflict.

Rising pressure

Costs, defects and major works are increasing stress levels within strata communities.

Digital communication risks

Emails and messaging can increase:

- misunderstandings
- reactive responses
- prolonged conflict

Wellbeing is becoming increasingly important

Strata is no longer purely operational. It is also:

- social
- emotional
- community-based

8. Key Takeaways

- most conflict is made worse by how it is communicated
- clear, calm communication reduces escalation
- process is often more effective than lengthy argument
- boundaries are reasonable and appropriate
- documentation and records matter
- protecting wellbeing is part of good strata management

9. Further Resources

- Consumer Affairs Victoria
- Dispute Settlement Centre Victoria
- VCAT