# An Introductory Guide to Call Handling

## Introduction

This has been created to provide you, at this current time, with a Guide to the key principles you need to know to be a Call Handler. It is designed to be used in conjunction with your organisation's policies and procedures particularly with reference to protecting vulnerable people from harm, managing information and confidentiality.

Your monitoring centre receives calls from technologies that help to keep people safe at home. In its simplest form this could mean a service user pressing a pendant to call for help. Alternatively, it could be technology that raises an alert if it detects that the service user may be at risk. This could be a smoke detector indicating that there is smoke in a property, or a bed sensor indicating that a service user has not got back into bed.

Regardless of the reason for the calls, your role as a Call Hander is key to ensuring that the safety, health and well-being of the service user at all times. The service user and their families are depending on you to provide a high quality service that reduces the risk of harm coming to them as a result of an accident, and reduces the severity of harm that could result.
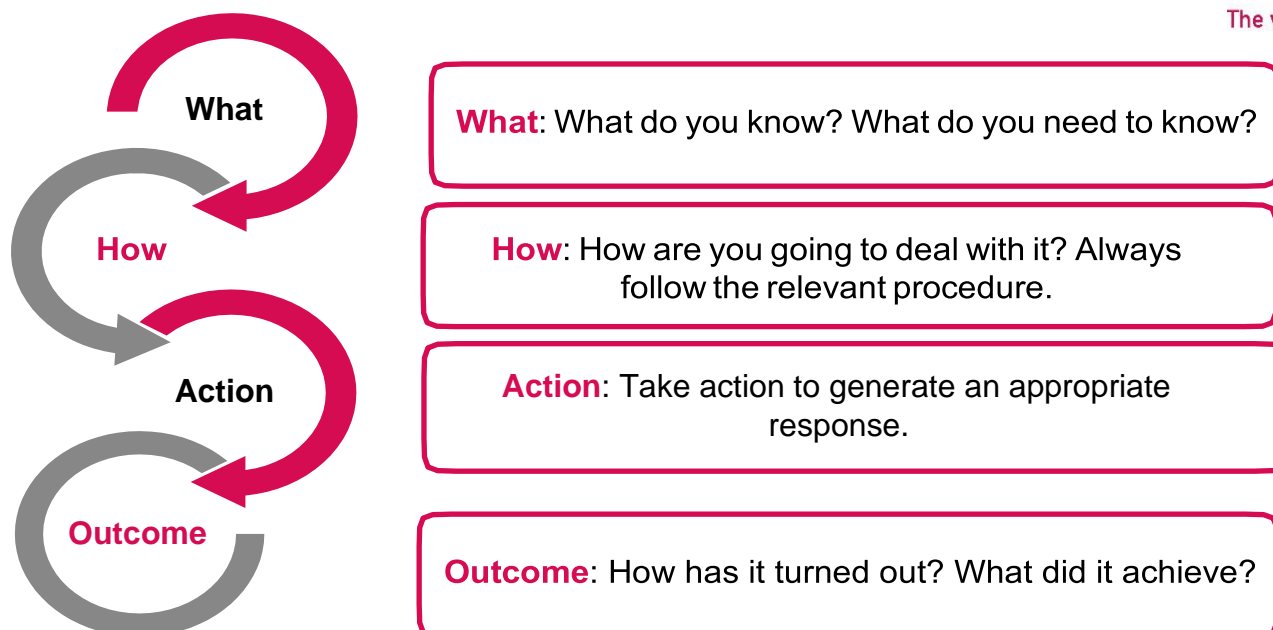
**Who is it for?**

**'Anyone'**



## The Call Handling Role

The primary requirement of you, as a Call Handler, is to manage the calls coming into the monitoring centre where an action is needed to deal with a situation to achieve a desired outcome.

**What**: What do you know? What do you need to know?

**How**: How are you going to deal with it? Always follow the relevant procedure.

**Action**: Take action to generate an appropriate response.

**Outcome**: How has it turned out? What did it achieve?

## The types of calls you will receive

There are number of different types of calls that you will be dealing with.  This is not an exhaustive list but gives you a general overview.

Inbound Calls – calls that you will receive

- No response

- Emergency / non-emergency

- Caller / visitor identification

- Equipment faults or planned maintenance

- Routine testing or installations

- Termination of service and/or collection of equipment

Handoff Calls

- Passing / handing over information to other agencies in the event of:

  » Emergency: 999 services

  » Non-emergency services: NHS111, GPs, Community nursing teams, social care teams etc.

- Unforeseen absence from home – going into hospital

- Passing / receiving information from next of kin / contacts / wardens / responders following an incident

Outbound Calls – where you are actively calling someone

- Making appointments

- Service quality checks / customer satisfaction

- Reassurance / welfare calls

- Proactive contacting where there are no signs of use.

Safeguarding

- Dealing with abuse, or suspected abuse, of vulnerable adults

- Complaint handling

Signposting

- Help or advice outside the remit of your service

# Answering the call

There are four key stages to the calls that you will be answering:

### 1. Introduction

Using an appropriate greeting including your name, and that of your organisation, followed by a question to ascertain how you can help the caller.

### 2. Conversation and information gathering

It is essential to gather information as quickly as possible to enable you to coordinate the appropriate response and reduce the risk of harm to the service user. Talking to the service user politely and calmly will allow you to gather information quickly to establish the reason for the call. Remember you could be dealing with someone who is distressed, or in pain.

- Check the customer records – what do you know about the service user? Do they have any medical history that is pertinent to the call? Have they contacted the monitoring center recently? If so, what were the reasons for the call?

- Ask the right questions – open questions enable you to gather more detailed information in a short space of time. For example, "Can you tell me what has happened?". Closed questions, where the service user can answer "Yes" and "No" may take longer because you need to ask more questions. For example, "Are you injured?"

- Listen – as well as asking questions, it is important to listen actively and hear what is being said, and what is going on in the background of a call. Using positive phrases like "I see" and "Yes" reassures the service user that you are listening to them.

- Repeating back what you have heard to the service user. This is a way of both clarifying the situation and offers reassurance to the service user that you can hear them and have understood. Avoid making assumptions, and don't offer personal opinions – this is both unprofessional and inappropriate.

## 3. Taking action

Once you have gathered the information and understand the situation you are dealing with you can take the relevant course of action in accordance with your organisations policies, procedures and protocols. These will include agreed courses of action for each service user in their customer records. You also need to be aware of any contractual obligations that specify particular protocols relevant to corporate clients.

## 4. Ending the call

Always summarise and reassure the service user of the actions that are being taken. Advise them to call back at any time if they have any concerns, or if the situation changes. Record the details of all the actions taken on the call concisely and accurately in the customer records. A call should not be closed until all actions have been completed and the appropriate response generated.

## Appropriate Responses

> **Remember: Never do nothing; there should always be an appropriate action to an alarm call you receive, and you are as responsible for**

All responses should always ensure the service user's safety and reduce the risk of harm. This includes making sure that you are aware if the situation changes at any time during an incident and taking action to update the relevant contacts and responding agencies of any deterioration or change in the circumstances.

## Nominated Responders

Many service users will have one or more nominated responders, they may be a family member or a neighbour, that have agreed to respond in the event of an alarm being received. It is essential to contact the responders quickly to reduce the amount of time a service user is without help.

What if a nominated responder does not answer? Follow your organisations procedure for escalating a call to a relevant agency, to ensure the risk of harm to the service user is minimised. It is important to leave a message for the nominated responder where possible, so they are aware of what is happening. It is never appropriate to simply keep trying to contact the nominated responders without escalating the call; this will potentially put the service user at risk of harm.

## Forced Entry

There may be occasions where a forced entry is needed to gain access to a service user's property as a result of an emergency call. This action should only ever be instigated where there is absolutely no other way to enter the property – it has not been possible to gain access using a key, key safe code, mobile warden / responder, or next of kin and there is genuine concern for the service users welfare.

Follow your organisation's procedures for implementing this response.

## Emergency Services Calls

There may be times that you need to contact the emergency services, where there is serious concern for a service users health and wellbeing. Your response needs to be appropriate and fully informed, using information gathered from both the call, and the service users' records.

## Ambulance Service

The information you pass to the Ambulance Service is used to determine the priority the ambulance service assigns to the call and can mean the difference between life and death. When passing calls to the ambulance service it is important to pass on the medical notes in the service users' records, along with other key information such as how they will gain entry to the property. This information may not always be requested, but ensure that it is passed to them

as it can influence how the call is triaged by the ambulance service; and gives a complete picture of the situation to enable them to make an informed decision as to the response required.

Where possible try and ascertain how long the response may be and keep the service user advised. It is important to ensure that you are continually able to monitor the service users condition until a responder or the ambulance service arrives. Follow your organisation's policies and procedures to achieve this.

If the service user is injured or unresponsive, the call should always be monitored until the emergency services arrive to check for any change in circumstances, or deterioration in the service user's situation. The health and wellbeing of the service user is your main concern and you need to be aware of any changes, and able to pass this information on to the relevant agency as quickly as possible.

## Fire Service

Fire statistics suggest that it is still the most vulnerable and socially isolated people in society that are at the highest risk of experiencing a fire. Technology Enabled Care (TEC) Services play a crucial role in the prevention and early intervention of the risk of harm through fire for vulnerable people.

Fire alarm calls should be clearly visually distinguishable and given priority from other alarm calls that you will receive.

All reasonable steps should be taken in the first instance to determine whether this is a false activation, for example someone has sprayed an aerosol near the smoke detector, which has activated the alarm call, or an actual fire before prior to contacting the Fire and Rescue Service.

## Overruling a service user's wishes

There may be some situations where it is necessary to overrule a service user's decision in relation to their health and wellbeing, and to ensure the appropriate help is given. This course of action should only be taken where there is serious cause for concern for a service user's, health and wellbeing.

Service User notes should be checked for any relevant information that may be pertinent in addressing your concerns that the service user's health and wellbeing are at risk, because they do not want you to take appropriate action; you must act in the interest of the service user and overrule their wishes by arranging the appropriate response to get them the help that they need.