

Managing Relationships

SANE Support Forum



Important

The SANE Forum is designed to provide a support community. As in any community relationships may develop and at times this may give rise to difficult, distressing or challenging feelings and situations. These guidelines are intended to provide support and guidance in managing relationships on the Forum.

1. Personal responsibility

The fundamental principle that underpins this Forum is that of personal responsibility. This applies to managing relationships, as to all aspects of community activity. This means:

- Taking responsibility for your own behaviour in the community, ie in terms of content and tone of your posts. Consider whether your posts incorporate the basic principles of support, responsibility, empathy and acceptance before posting.
- Being mindful of the effect of your posts on other members, including new members, or those who may be considering joining the community.

The following are examples of difficulties that may arise and guidance for dealing with them.

2. '*Trig*' posts

As a general principle, if you are feeling vulnerable, please consider whether it is sensible to read posts/threads marked with a '*Trig*'. You must consider your own well-being as a matter of priority and if you feel you may be unsettled by someone else's distress, please consider the effect of exposing yourself to such posts.

NB: Suicide – you may experience suicidal thoughts and feelings; you may have suicide plans. The community is designed to provide support for those who need it, including those who are feeling suicidal, and we wish you to be free to discuss such thoughts and feelings.

However, if you have suicide plans please be mindful of how you express these; the sense of responsibility and helplessness that may be left with other members if you post about such plans but are unable to be receptive to support offered may be difficult and distressing.

Please note: The role of the moderators is to enable the Forum to be a space for members to engage in providing mutual support. This role does not include providing emotional or practical support directly to members, including those who may be suicidal or in crisis.

If you are in crisis or feeling suicidal – in addition to the Support Forum, SANE provides helpline and email services. You can contact either of these for emotional support and a space to explore options that may be available to you. Our national helpline **SANEline** is open everyday from **6pm until 11pm on 0845 767 8000**. While not a crisis service, **SANEmail** can be contacted via the SANE website at any time. You may find it helpful to write out your feelings; however, it's worth bearing in mind it can take 3 - 5 working days to receive a reply, although we aim to respond to urgent messages as quickly as possible.

If you feel in immediate or urgent need of help, please visit the '**Crisis**' link on the Emotional Support page which provides a list of options that may be available to you.

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3. Established members / new or potential members

All members, both new and established, are entitled to equal space, presence and weight in the community. At any one time, the community is likely to host both well-established, long-standing members, and a wide range of new members and people who may be observing the Forum while considering whether to join. Balancing the needs of these different groups requires awareness and sensitivity on the part of all members.

It may take time for new members to understand the principles and ethos of the community; please allow them time to settle in, providing supportive information about community guidelines where appropriate. It is also helpful if established members keep an eye out for new members, acknowledging introductory posts, welcoming new members etc.

In order to help new members settle into the communal spaces, the PM system will not be available to new members until they have posted 25 posts.

While a sense of an established community can provide a feeling of security and confidence in the Forum, it may also be experienced as a potential difficulty for new or potential members. We ask established members to be mindful of this, and to be aware when topics become focused on issues that pertain largely or solely to established members.

SANE requests that established members are mindful of discussing historical events if they are not relevant to current needs and activities in the community. Resurrecting material which is not in the spirit of providing mutual support may have potentially negative effects on new or potential members. Moderators reserve the right to remove such content.

4. Balancing different needs

SANE aims to make this a space that is available and supportive to people across the full spectrum of mental illness. Some diagnoses are considered 'mild', others 'severe'; some experience 'acute' illness, others 'chronic'. However, individuals will experience different levels of need and/or distress at different times regardless of where they fall on the spectrum of diagnosis; our aim is to ensure that a wide range of individuals with a range of possibly fluctuating need will find a space in the community where they feel comfortable.

As with any group of people, some will be more extrovert, some shy and more introvert than others. Some will feel more / less confident than others about posting. Some members may use the Forum daily; some will be less frequent/intermittent visitors. Some people will have more intense needs / presentations than others.

Please keep these different feelings/needs in mind, so that all members feel there is a space for them, that all have an equal 'weight' and presence in the community and that, in particular, the quieter, less intense or dramatic spaces are respected.

5. Feeling uncomfortable about a particular member

You may feel uncomfortable about a particular member, perhaps because of the content of their posts, their style of writing or some other factor.

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In such circumstances you may wish to use the 'Foes' function in the User Control Panel. This language is not particularly helpful; however, it is integral to the site software. In practice, it simply means that if you identify someone as a 'Foe' your view of the screen will allow you to see that the member has posted, but will hide the content of their posts.

6. Groups

Within any community groups are likely to form, based on common interests and/or personalities. This can have a positive and cohesive effect within the community so long as the needs of the whole community are kept in mind. However, the formation of such groups may also be experienced in a negative and excluding way.

SANE asks you to be aware of this delicate balance, particularly if you find yourself 'taking sides' or acting in a way likely to be experienced as excluding to other members. Moderators reserve to take action in such situations.

7. Managing difficulties in relationships

Difficulties in relationships may arise in a number of ways – below are suggestions/recommendations about effective ways of addressing this:

(i) Personality clash/personal differences – differences in personalities, opinions and attitudes may arise. While such differences can be managed by the application of the Forum principles, there may be occasions when difficulties arise.

You are expected to take personal responsibility for any part you have in such situations and to resolve matters between yourself and any other member/s. This may be done by:

- Stating your personal feelings clearly, eg by saying 'I felt – upset/ angry/ hurt/ frightened' as appropriate, but without making assumptions/ judgements/ statements about others, ie take responsibility for your own feelings. This approach encourages others to consider their position. Focusing on 'you', 'he', 'she', 'they' etc is not helpful in enabling this process.
- PMs - you and/or the other relevant member/s may agree to resolve the situation via PM. It is not appropriate or helpful for personal conflicts to be played out in public and will not be tolerated by the moderators. Such behaviour may result in pre-moderation of posts or other moderating actions as deemed appropriate.
- You can decide to disengage from the situation.
- If you are not directly involved in the situation, do **NOT** engage in any interaction, even when such engagement is intended to 'protect' or 'support' one or other member/s. Such engagement is rarely helpful and is more likely to prolong or inflame a situation. Moderators reserve the right to take action in such situations.
- Take time out from the Forum, if you feel you may be too involved in a situation, or do not feel able to take constructive or supportive action for yourself and/or others.

These steps/strategies can be helpful in enabling both you and others to consider and understand your role/s and responsibilities in dealing with difficulties in interactions.

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SANE acknowledges that acting on such principles may feel difficult; however, the most effective way of dealing with such difficulties is to encourage understanding of how and why these situations arise and to work towards resolution and understanding. This can be beneficial both for the individuals directly concerned and for the community as a whole.

If you are unable or unwilling to act on these recommendations, the moderators may intervene through pre-moderation of individual/s posts and/or other actions as deemed appropriate. Moderators reserve the right to remove any content relevant to such situations.

(ii) A member becomes unwell – because of the nature of mental illness, there may be times when individual members become unwell, and behaviour and responses may be informed by anxiety, fear or paranoia. In such circumstances, the member's presence may appear to be irrational, difficult or insensitive.

The most effective approach to adopt in such circumstances is:

- To offer understanding and support.
- **To NOT** engage if you feel you cannot offer support or understanding.

In such cases, the moderators reserve the right to take action through pre-moderation of posts or to encourage and/or enable member/s to take a break from the community, perhaps through temporary suspension of access to their account. This can help provide a time and space for the individual and others to reflect upon and consider the situation.

If a member's account is suspended, support will continue to be offered by SANE through other channels until such time as the individual feels well enough, or is assessed to be well enough, to rejoin the community. Any such action will respect the confidentiality of the individual, while holding in mind the well-being of the community as a whole.

(iii) Other types of difficult behaviour – occasionally, the Forum may be joined by a user whose intention, demonstrated through the nature and content of their posts, appears to be to cause distress, dissent and conflict, without regard to community guidelines. This may be known by a number of titles in the world of online forums, eg trolling/inflaming; SANE's approach is to address any behaviour that does not respect Forum guidelines.

In such situations, should such member/s prove unable and/or unwilling to respond to input either from moderators and/or other members, appropriate action will be taken. This may include summary deactivation of accounts and deletion of relevant posts.

We recommend that you do **NOT** engage with, or respond to, any posts or other contributions from such members. This is the most effective response to such a presence as it neutralises the intention of causing distress and conflict.

8. Bullying

Bullying behaviour is not acceptable as it directly contravenes the community's ethos and principles. If you accept and apply the community principles, bullying should not arise.

Referring to the community's ethos and principles is one way of testing whether your contributions comply with the intention of providing mutual support. Alternatively, asking yourself the following simple questions should also help to clarify motivation:

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- 'Does my contribution have the intention of providing support?'
- 'Does my post have the wellbeing of an individual and/or community at heart?'

Ideally, personal responsibility should address such situations. However, should this not be the case, the moderators will take appropriate action if:

- Contributions/posts appear not to comply with the community principles and ethos, and are causing distress and/or allegations of bullying **and**
- The relevant individual/s do not seem to be taking responsibility for their contributions and/or reactions and responses.

9. Taking time out

As suggested earlier, a member may voluntarily decide to take time out from the Forum as a way of helping to deal with difficult situations or interactions.

Depending on need or context the moderators reserve the right to take action to encourage and/or enable member/s to take a break for an agreed period of time. This can help provide a time and space for the individual and others to reflect upon and consider the situation.

Ideally, time out will be agreed between all parties and undertaken voluntarily.

10. Suspension of accounts

Suspension of accounts will be implemented where there is clear evidence that an individual is unable and/or unwilling to abide by the community ethos and guidelines and/or is unable to be receptive to guidance from the moderating team in relation to how a situation might be resolved. Please see 'Role of moderators' for further information about account suspension.

**Please note: These Guidelines may be periodically reviewed and updated.
Announcements about any changes or amendments will be posted on the Forum.**