

Support Person Guidelines With/Without an External Mediator

A support person for the complainant can facilitate a conversation with the person subject to a complaint – or they can derail the conversation by additionally attacking the person subject to a complaint.

Ideally the support person would view guidelines prior to the conversation between the complainant and the person subject to the complaint. See below.

A. Without Mediator

1. Role at the start

- The complainant and the subject of the complaint are the primary speakers.
- Respect, confidentiality, speaking one at a time.

Purpose check questions:

- *“What’s the role you are hoping to play today?”*
- *“How will you support [name] while letting them speak for themselves?”*

2. Helpful functions support people can undertake

A. Emotional support

- Calm presence
- Helping the complainant regulate emotions or feel safe

B. Communication support

- Assisting with anxiety, language, memory, neurodiversity
- Clarifying factual details when invited

C. Cultural / whānau support

- Tikanga guidance
- Protecting mana and relational safety
- Offering cultural framing when appropriate

D. Practical support

- Note-taking
- Supporting understanding of the process

- Ensuring any physical/medical needs are managed

E. Accountability support

- Helping the complainant follow through on decisions
 - Encouraging clarity and realistic commitments
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3. The support person should avoid

- Speaking on behalf of the complainant when they can speak for themselves
- Coaching answers
- Emotional displays (eye-rolling, sarcasm, venting their own emotions)
- Domineering or intimidating behaviour towards the subject of the complaint.

Correction tools to use with the support person if needed:

- Light redirection eg *It's normal practice in these situations that you support X but don't participate in any accusations.*
 - Re-setting expectations, boundaries
 - If the support person is unable to keep to the guideline they would usually be asked to leave or the meeting terminated or postponed to another time when the guidelines will be adhered to, perhaps with an alternative support person.
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5. End-of-session review

- Did the support person's presence assist the process?
 - Should they remain involved in follow-up meetings?
 - Any adjustments needed for cultural or emotional safety next time?
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B. With Mediator

Phrases mediator can use (calm, clear, polite, and firm)

The mediator will invite the support person to contribute at various points otherwise the support person stays quiet.

Setting expectations (opening)

“Just to confirm, the main speakers today will be the two of you. It’s normal practice that the support person contributes only when the mediator invites them to.”

- *“Your role is to support, not to take over. Does that feel workable for you?”*
 - *“Let’s agree that any help you offer will be respectful and non-adversarial.”*
 - *“You’re welcome here. I’ll guide you when it’s the right time for you to speak.”*
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If support person starts taking over

- *“Can I hold you there — I’d like to hear that directly from [name].”*
 - *“Let’s pause. I’ll ask the two people directly involved in the complaint to speak first. I’ll come to you afterwards if needed.”*
 - *“I appreciate your intention to help. For now, I need to keep the focus on the other two.”*
 - *“I’ll invite you in at the appropriate moment, but not just yet.”*
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If support person is coaching, whispering, or influencing

- *“I need to make sure the ideas and decisions are coming from [name], not from anyone else.”*
 - *“Please hold back for a moment so I can hear their own thinking.”*
 - *“Let’s allow [name] to respond without input for now.”*
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If behaviour becomes disruptive

- *“I’m noticing some reactions that are making it harder for us to continue respectfully. I need those to stop.”*
 - *“I’m going to ask everyone to stay calm and avoid commentary or gestures.”*
 - *“This tone isn’t helping. Let’s reset.”*
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If a break is needed

- *“Let’s pause for a five-minute break while we reset expectations.”*
- *“I’d like a private moment with each person to clarify roles.”*

- “We’ll stop briefly so we can ensure the process remains safe and balanced.”
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If you need to limit or remove the support person

- “Your presence is important, but the way things are going is affecting the balance of the mediation. I may need you to step back or wait outside.”
 - “To protect the process, I’m going to continue the conversation with just the two people present.”
 - “You are welcome to remain onsite, but not in the main room right now.”
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Affirming helpful support

- “Thank you for your calm presence — it’s clearly helping [name].”
 - “Your cultural guidance here is valuable, thank you.”
 - “You are supporting without dominating — that’s exactly what we need.”
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