



# healthy neighbourhoods

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Preventing, managing and resolving neighbourhood disputes

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Your rights and responsibilities as a neighbour

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Relevant agencies and organisations that can help you

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**Conflict Resolution  
Service**

telephone 6295 5998

*It may  
not always  
be possible  
to resolve  
every dispute,  
but every dispute  
can be managed*



## Preventing and managing neighbourhood disputes

No matter how healthy your neighbourhood is, problems can arise quite suddenly. If disputes are not dealt with, they can grow out of all proportion. So here are some suggestions for preventing and managing neighbourhood disputes.

- Get to know your neighbours.
- Consult with your neighbour before you take any action that may impact on them.
- Take your neighbour's concerns seriously, even if they seem small issues to you.
- When people feel heard and understood it is easier to work through a problem
- Don't assume the other person knows there is a problem—often they don't.
- Sometimes it is a simple misunderstanding.
- Discuss your approach with friends or family. They may have some useful ideas.
- Make an attempt to talk or write to your neighbour before involving authorities and other agencies.
- Remember to focus on the problem not the person.
- Work on what you can change, not what you can't.
- If you and your neighbour cannot agree on a change, implement strategies to reduce stress.
- Ask for help, seek advice

### CONTACT:

#### Conflict Resolution Service

for impartial, specialist assistance in the prevention and management of your dispute.



## Approaching your neighbour about a problem

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**DECIDE** what is important to you—your needs and concerns.

**MAKE** a time and a place to discuss it with the other person—where both of you are comfortable and ready to talk.

**STATE** your concerns—from your point of view. Explain how you feel—do not attack or make accusations.

**LET** the other person respond. Their first response may be angry or upset. Give them time to understand.

**HEAR** the concerns of the other person—and show you have heard. Give yourself time to understand them.

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**DISCUSS** all the issues, which are of concern. A ‘minor’ issue left unsaid can become a major argument later on.

**THINK** about a range of possible solutions. The best ideas are not always the first ones. Work towards agreements, which satisfy the needs of both (‘WIN-WIN’).

**BE CLEAR** about what you have agreed on. Check your understanding with the other person. Ideally you may wish to put agreements in writing.

**CHECK** with each other after a while to see how things are going. If need be, make changes to the agreement.

**ALLOW** yourself and the other person to be human, to make mistakes, to get emotional, to be irrational, to be imperfect.

**ACCEPT** that sometimes a dispute can be too difficult to resolve; a sensible approach does not always work.

## The Conflict Resolution Service (CRS) offers specialist help

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### Dispute counselling

Information, advice, support and referral.

### Mediation

- Mediation is voluntary, impartial and confidential.
- Mediation is free and can be organised quickly.
- Mediators reflect the diversity of the community (i.e. in terms of age, gender and ethnicity).
- Mediations are conducted by two mediators.
- Mediators keep control of the process throughout the session.
- The people in dispute decide what is discussed and what is agreed.
- The person with whom you are having a dispute is contacted by CRS to invite them to mediation.
- Mediation can be between two or more parties.
- Most mediated disputes are resolved within one session.
- Mediation is not appropriate if you don’t feel safe to agree/disagree with the other person.

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### Success rate

**83%** of mediated neighbourhood disputes reached agreement (1999/2001 CRS Annual Reports).

### Training and information sessions

CRS conducts information and training sessions in conflict resolution skills for interested groups in the community, schools, workplace, government and non-government agencies.

## Neighbourhood issues

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### Animal nuisance

An animal nuisance exists if an animal causes:

- Damage to property owned by a person other than the keeper
- Excessive noise, or
- Danger to the health of an animal or a person other than the keeper.

*For more information contact:*

#### Domestic Animal Services (DAS)

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telephone: 6207 2424 (Monday–Friday), or  
13 2281 (After hours/emergency)

email: [dogcontrol@act.gov.au](mailto:dogcontrol@act.gov.au)

web: [www.domesticanimals.act.gov.au](http://www.domesticanimals.act.gov.au)

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### Fences and structures, construction

*For information on construction and obligations contact:*

#### Planning and Land Management

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telephone: 6207 3022

web: [www.palm.act.gov.au](http://www.palm.act.gov.au)

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### Home business

*For more information or if you have concerns about the impact of a home business contact:*

#### Planning and Land Management

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telephone: 6207 1923

web: [www.palm.act.gov.au](http://www.palm.act.gov.au)

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## Long grass, dirty blocks

### Planning and Land Management

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telephone: 6207 3022

web: [www.palm.act.gov.au](http://www.palm.act.gov.au)

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### Trees

Trees affecting neighbouring properties can be a cause of dispute. Many disputes can be resolved through communication between neighbours.

*If a tree removal/damaging activity is required, you will need to seek permission from:*

#### Environment ACT

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helpline: 6207 9777 or

web: [www.environment.act.gov.au](http://www.environment.act.gov.au)

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### Noise

Noise standards

for commercial and residential areas are covered under the *ACT Environment Protection Act 1997*. Amplified music, band practice, air conditioners and pool pumps must comply with the zone noise standards.

*For information about noise levels and time restrictions for residential areas and specific activities, contact:*

#### Environment ACT

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telephone:  
6207 9777

web:  
[www.environment.act.gov.au](http://www.environment.act.gov.au)

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## Air and water

There is a total ban on the burning of garden or other waste in urban areas. Indoor fires, including slow combustion stoves, must be managed to minimise smoke emissions. Discharge of any waste into the stormwater system is an offence.

*For information, contact:*

### Environment ACT

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telephone: 6207 9777

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web: [www.environment.act.gov.au](http://www.environment.act.gov.au)

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## Anti-social behaviour

Acts or threats involving violence, malicious property damage or theft and dangerous or noisy operation of motor vehicles should be reported to the ACT Police.

*For more information contact:*

### ACT Police

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for routine enquiries contact your local police station or ring the police switchboard: 6256 7777

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for police to attend: 131 444

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for life-threatening emergencies only: 000

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If you are concerned about acts or threats of violence, one option is to apply for a protection order from a court. However, another option is to consider mediation.

**Mediations have been held at Police Stations to address safety concerns.**

## Unregistered cars, off-street and unsafe parking

### Road User Services

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telephone: 6207 7000

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web: [www.urbanservices.act.gov.au](http://www.urbanservices.act.gov.au)

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## Legal advice

The ACT Legal Aid Office offers three services to people dealing with neighbourhood disputes:

- Free telephone advice: 9am–4pm, Monday–Friday on 1300 654 314.
- Free half-hour appointments available in Woden and Civic. Telephone: 6243 3471 for an appointment.
- Duty lawyers, at the Magistrates Court for help with your situation, including applications for Protection Orders. Telephone 6217 4299 for a free appointment.

*For more information see the Legal Aid website:*

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web: [www.legalaid.canberra.net.au](http://www.legalaid.canberra.net.au)

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## Welfare Rights and Legal Centre

Provides free legal advice and assistance on private and government housing tenancy issues for low income earners.

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telephone: 6247 2177

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## Small claims—Magistrates Court

An application can be made to the Small Claims Court to recover the cost of:

- Damages caused by someone else's actions.
- Nuisance (interference with your land, or your enjoyment of your land—for example an overflow from a neighbour's burst sewerage pipe onto your land).
- Trespass (unauthorised, uninvited entry onto, or remaining on, your land).

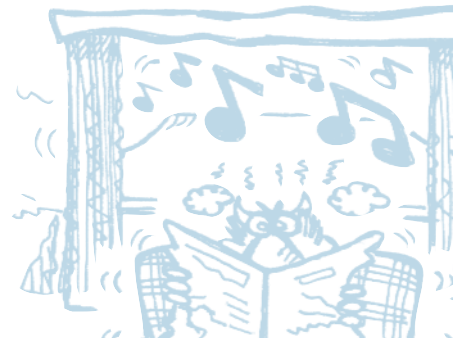
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Fees apply.

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telephone:  
6217 4272

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## Other sources of help and advice

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### Canberra Connect

Gateway to ACT Government information and services

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telephone: 13 22 81

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web: [www.canberraconnect.act.gov.au](http://www.canberraconnect.act.gov.au)

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### ACT Ombudsman

The ACT Ombudsman can investigate complaints about the actions or decisions of any ACT Government agency.

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telephone: 6276 0111

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web: <http://act.ombudsman.gov.au>

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email: [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au)

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### 8 Mental Health Crisis Team

For advice and crisis service for people with mental illness or dysfunction.

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telephone: 6205 1065 or 1800 629 354

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web: [www.mentalhealth.act.gov.au](http://www.mentalhealth.act.gov.au)

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### ACT Health, Health Protection Service

Investigates complaints regarding public health hazards and disease risks.

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telephone: 6205 1700

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web: [www.health.act.gov.au](http://www.health.act.gov.au)

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### ACT Housing Customer Assistance Helpline

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telephone: 62071515

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### Human Rights Office of the ACT

Investigates and conciliates complaints of discrimination, sexual harassment and racial vilification.

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telephone: 6207 0576

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web: [www.hro.act.gov.au](http://www.hro.act.gov.au)

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email: [human.rights@act.gov.au](mailto:human.rights@act.gov.au)

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**Victim Services Scheme** Access to counselling and other services for victims of crime.

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telephone: 1800 822 272

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**ACTewAGL** Enquiries and emergencies: Electricity, water, sewerage, stormwater, trees in powerlines and natural gas.

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telephone: 13 14 93

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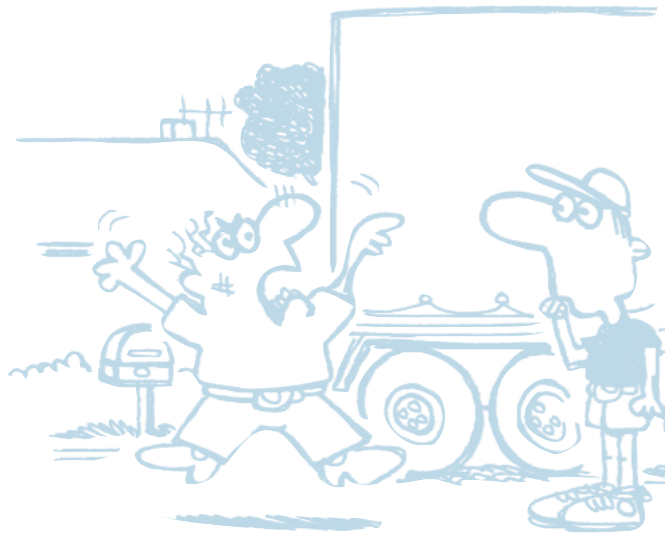
### Translating and Interpreter Service

For language assistance:

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telephone: 13 14 50

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## **Conflict Resolution Service**

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**telephone: 6295 5998**

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**facsimile: 6295 5992**

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**e-mail: [mediation@crs.org.au](mailto:mediation@crs.org.au)**

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**web: [www.crs.org.au](http://www.crs.org.au)**

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