

## High Hedges

### When Hedges grow out of control

Problems can occur if a hedge is allowed to grow unchecked. If you are troubled by someone else's hedge, the best way to deal with the issues is to approach them and talk to them about your concerns.

The High Hedges Acts only applies to evergreen trees or shrubs comprising of two or more stems and which are above 2 metres in height. The advice given by the government is that the council should only be involved in a hedge dispute as a last resort.

Sometimes, calling in the council or going to court only makes matters worse - after all you have to live near your neighbours. The solutions given on this page can be tried even if you have already fallen out with your neighbour.

### Step One: Be Prepared

Before you contact your neighbour, be clear in your own mind about what the problem is. For example:

- The hedge may be blocking light to the main rooms of your home;
- It may deprive you of winter sunshine;
- It may have spread into your garden and could be affecting the growth of your plants;
- The hedge could be pushing over your fence as it grows.

### Step Two: Making the first move

It is recommended that this first approach is only to fix a time and place so that you and your neighbour can talk about the problem properly. You are most likely to be able to sort things out if you:

- Speak to your neighbour face to face, rather than pushing a note through the door;
- Don't rush them into a discussion too soon, they also need time to think;
- Invite them into your home so they can see things from your side of the hedge. But don't press it if they are uncomfortable with the idea. Even if you and your neighbour aren't on

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speaking terms, it is still worth trying to set aside your differences to find a solution to your hedge problem.

In these circumstances, you might prefer to make the first move by letter. Think carefully about what you put in it:

- Stick to the facts - you might want to describe the problems caused by the hedge;
- Look forward don't dwell on past failures to sort this out;
- Take the heat out of the situation by airing your differences in a cool and collected manner;
- Don't be rude or abusive.

### Step Three: It's good to talk

How to approach the situation when you get together with your neighbour. You might want to:

- Welcome the chance to try and sort things out;
- Tell your side of things. Use the notes you have prepared to say what the problem is and how it affects you;
- Be honest and say how you feel, but be prepared for your neighbour to do the same;
- Show your neighbour the problems that the hedge is causing;
- Don't accuse, insult or blame and don't charge in with a list of demands;
- Let your neighbours have their say, without interrupting them.

Talking to a stranger - mediation: If your neighbour refuses to talk to you, you can ask for the help of independent mediators. Mediators are totally impartial. They don't tell you what to do but help you and your neighbour to work towards finding your own answer. You can approach them even if your neighbour hasn't yet agreed to take part. For mediation to be a success both you and your neighbour must co-operate in the process.

Your local mediation service is: South Yorkshire Victim Offender Mediation Service 0114 241 2790..

### Step Four: Finding the right answer

This is the difficult part because there is no single right answer. To find what is best for both of you:

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- Make sure that you have both got all your issues out in the open and both aired your views;
- Sort out the things you can agree on - even if it is agreeing to differ;
- Treat it as a shared problem that you need to solve together;
- Be ready to consider all ideas and suggestions, including what you might do;

Look at all the options before picking the one that suits you both.

## Step Five: Putting the answer into practice

Now you have your answer, whether you've negotiated this yourselves or with the help of your mediators. What to do:

- Make sure you both know who is meant to do what and by when - it's a good idea to write this down;
- Set a date to check how your agreement is working;
- Agree how you will let each other know about any future problems. Treat it as a shared problem that you need to solve together;

## Involving the council as a last resort

If you have gone through the above steps and haven't been able to resolve your dispute, you can get in touch with the Council and we can advise you on the next stage.

Before you approach the council, we advise that you write to your neighbour to let them know what you are going to do. Remember, keep the letter short and simple and don't make it sound like a threat. We will expect you to have gone through the steps outlined above before you approach us for help. If we do not feel that you have done enough to try to resolve your complaint, we may ask you to go away and look again at the five steps.

To get in touch with customer services please do so via the website: [www.doncaster.gov.uk](http://www.doncaster.gov.uk)

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