

# BVA guide to tackling online abuse in the veterinary sector

## Create social media house rules for your business

Make sure you don't respond in haste. Agree rules and the actions you'll take if individuals don't follow those rules in advance.

Make these rules visible on your social media channels or website

## Keep a record of the abuse

Screenshot or copy all examples of online abuse and keep updated records. This can be used to escalate your response or back up any decisions you make about banning people or reporting and deleting comments

## Make use of each platform's reporting tools

Each platform has rules that all users must follow. You can mute, block, and report accounts on Twitter. You can hide, delete, and report comments and accounts on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram

Social media businesses can remove content and accounts that defy their rules

## Escalate and take action where appropriate

Threatening, abusive, or offensive language on social media may be a criminal offence

If you need to, contact the police and the social media channel to report your concerns

## Protect your own and your colleague's wellbeing

Dealing with online abuse can be hard. Take a break and if you're struggling, reach out to Vetlife for 24/7 support for all who work in the veterinary professions

## Take complaints offline

Complaints or negative reviews can really harm small businesses. Where you receive a complaint online, reply in a professional and polite way and ask to speak to them privately to discuss the issue, either in person, by email, or over the phone. This can help control the conversation and fix the issue that's causing complaints faster

Make your complaints policy visible and simple to use so that clients can use this route before complaining online

## Protect your privacy

Regularly review the privacy settings on your accounts and make sure you're happy with the personal information you're making available on the internet

Make sure your staff are protected by discussing how much personal and professional information they're happy to have shared online on company websites or social media

## Follow the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons social media guidance

See Chapter 28 *Social media and online networking forums* of the RCVS Code