



Who Are Inappropriate Callers?

"**Inappropriate callers**" are individuals who seek sexual gratification by sharing explicit information or prompting specific responses during phone calls. This behavior, known as **telephone scatologia** (also called *telephone scatophilia* or *telephonicophilia*), is a type of **verbal exhibitionism**. These callers vary in methods and presentation and may target various companies or organizations. Technologies like **spoofing** allow callers to generate new phone numbers, making it difficult to block them effectively.

Often, obscene calls are persistent and made by chronic offenders. Dealing with such calls can be distressing, but understanding these callers and how to respond can help you manage the situation.

Pay attention to your **gut-feelings, intuition, or hunches**; as well as your **physical/bodily reactions** to the situation (e.g., tense, clammy, heart racing, very alert). Our bodies sometimes recognize things before our brain. **If it feels wrong, it is okay to set a boundary.**

Identifying Inappropriate Callers

The variability in methods and the callers' likely experience can make it hard to recognize inappropriate calls. Callers might not speak, make sexual noises, or breathe heavily. Research on this phenomenon is limited, but researchers have identified three types of telephone scatologia presentations, with a proposed fourth type. Here are their defining characteristics to help you identify sexually inappropriate callers:

Note: These categories are flexible and may not cover all scenarios - consider each characteristic individually.



Type 1

- **Immediate** obscene language or sexual propositions
- Swearing
- Disclosing sexual activities
- Typically **adolescents**
- **Most prevalent**



Type 2

- "*Ingratiating seducers*"
- Begins with **flattery**
- Becomes more offensive/suggestive
- May provide **backstory** of love from afar, prior interactions, or mutual friends



Type 3

- "*Tricksters*"
- Use a **ruse** (e.g., pretending to conduct a survey) to discuss personal matters
- Attempts to gain **intimate details** from the listener
- **Leads to** obscene and sexual suggestions



Type 4

- Targets **crisis lines**
- Seeks "help" only from **female** workers or volunteers
- Speaks about **sexual matters** or nudity
- Sexually pleases self during call
- Situations often include family and/or experiences of victimization

Phrase Bank

Responding to Inappropriate Callers

What to DO:

- **Write down** the phone number of the inappropriate caller.
- **Never** answer personal questions or give out personal information.
- Do not be afraid to **interrupt** the caller.
- **Restate** the scope of your services.
- **Clearly express** professional boundaries.
- If the caller ignores a boundary, **reestablish** it and **inform them** that you are going to hang up and report their conduct to your supervisor.
- If the caller ignores your warnings, **hang up**.
- If the caller begins threatening you or their behavior escalates, **hang up**.
- You can put the caller **on hold** for your supervisor, and/or **report** the incident to your supervisor after the call.
- **Try not to react** emotionally during the call. This might be the caller's goal.

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Sources

M. Griffiths: The Psychology of Obscene Telephone Calling (2017)
Siddiqui, Javed & Qureshi, Shazia & al-duraibi, Abdullah: Verbal Exhibitionism: A Brief Synopsis of Telephone Scatology (2017)

- “I can only answer professional questions. Personal questions are not appropriate to ask.”
- “Unfortunately, it sounds like your situation falls outside the scope of our office.”
- “I can share our office services with you, but I cannot discuss anything else.”
- “If you can't let me know what you are calling for, I am going to have to let you go.”
- “This call is no longer productive, and I'm going to hang up now.”
- “Please do not share explicit sexual information or use explicit language. I will need to hang up if it continues.”
- “Providing the level of explicit detail that you are is not appropriate for this call.”
- “Please stop *behavior* or I will hang up and consult my supervisor.”

Remember:

- You *NEVER* deserve to experience sexual harassment - this applies to clients/customers while working.
- You are allowed to express your boundaries in a professional manner, inform the caller you will report their conduct to your supervisor, and hang up the phone.
- Instances of verbal exhibitionism may be considered illegal under Minnesota statute 617.23, subdivision 1 (as third type of qualifying “act”).
- Sexually inappropriate calls affect people differently. *Take care of yourself* and assess what actions or resources may be helpful. Contact the Aurora Center for support.