How to Deal with Neighbour Disputes

Follow these steps if you have a dispute with your neighbour.

1. Talk to your neighbour
   Solve the problem informally
   • Before making a formal complaint or getting others involved, try to discuss the problem with your neighbour.
   • If you’re worried about the approaching them, write a letter, explaining the problem clearly and sticking to the facts.
   • If the problem affects other neighbours, involve them as well. It can be easier to settle a dispute if the complaint comes from a number of people.
   • A tenants' association might help if you’re a member of one.
   • Get practical advice from Citizens Advice to deal with common neighbour disputes, like high hedges.

2. Contact your neighbour’s landlord
   • If your neighbour is a tenant, you can complain to their landlord. This could be a housing association, the council or a private landlord.

3. Use a mediation service
   • If you can’t resolve the dispute by speaking to your neighbour, get help from a mediation service.

How Mediation Works
   • Mediation is where an impartial person - trained in dealing with difficult discussions between two opposing sides - acts as a referee in a dispute.
   • There can be a fee for mediation, but this will still be cheaper than hiring a solicitor and taking legal action.

Contact a mediation service
   Mediation services differ depending on where you live:
   • If you live in England and Wales, find a mediation provider in your area.
   • Your council or housing association may provide a mediation service.
   • The charity LawWorks provides free mediation.

4. Complain about noise to the council
   You can ask your local council for help if the neighbour dispute involves an activity that is damaging to health or a nuisance. This is known as a 'statutory nuisance'.

   This could include:
   • Noise (including loud music and barking dogs)
   • Artificial light (except street lamps)
   • Dust, steam, smell or insects from business premises
   • Smoke, fumes or gases
   • A build-up of rubbish that could harm health.

   Your council has a duty to investigate any statutory nuisance.

   You should always try and solve the problem by talking to your neighbour or through mediation before contacting the council.

Penalties
   If the council decides someone is causing a statutory noise nuisance they must issue a ‘noise abatement’ order. This tells the person what they must do to stop making a noise nuisance or else face further legal action.

   If someone breaks an abatement order about noise from their home, they can be fined up to £5,000. If it’s noise from a factory or business, the penalty can be up to £20,000.

5. High hedges, trees and boundaries.
   You must try to settle a dispute about a high hedge informally before the council can intervene.
   Ask your council for a complaint form if the hedge is all of these:
   • Two or more mostly evergreen or semi-evergreen trees or shrubs
   • Over two meters tall
   • Affecting your enjoyment of your home or garden because it’s too tall.
   • You might have to pay council a fee to consider your complaint.
   • Read more about complaining to your council about a high hedge.

When you can trim hedges or trees
   • You can trim branches or roots that cross into your property from a neighbour’s property or a public road.
   • You can only trim up to the property boundary. If you do more than this, your neighbour could take you to court for damaging their property.
   • If you live in a conservation area, or the trees in the hedge are protected by a ‘tree preservation order’, you might need your council’s permission to trim them.

If your property boarders a road
   • The highways authority can ask you to cut back hedges or trees on your property if they’re causing an obstruction in the road. If you refuse, they can go into your property without your permission to do the work themselves. They may charge you for this.

Property damage from hedges
   • Your neighbour is responsible for maintaining their hedges so they don’t, for example, damage your property or grow too high. If they do damage your property, your neighbour may be liable.

Boundaries and shared ('party') walls
   • Disputes about what is the exact boundary between two properties can be difficult to solve so get legal advice.
   • You must give notice to your neighbour if you are going to do work on a shared ('party') wall.
   • The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) has free advice on boundary disputes and party walls (the walls you share with your neighbours).

6. Call the police
   You should call the police if your neighbour:
   • Is violent, threatening or abusive
   • Is harassing you sexually, or because of your sexuality, religion or ethnic background
   • Is breaching the peace (being disorderly in the street or making a lot of noise)
   • Is breaking the law in any other way - or if you suspect this

7. Take action through the courts
   • If all else fails, you can take legal action against a neighbour.
   • Taking someone to court can be expensive so it should be your last resort if nothing else works. There may be court fees and you may have to pay a solicitor.

Legal Advice
   • You can get free legal advice from a law centre, advice centre or Citizens Advice.
   • You can also find a lawyer who deals with neighbour disputes through the Law Society.