



The Ethics of Care in Selling to Customers in Crisis

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THE WHOLE PROCESS OF SELLING PRODUCTS TO PEOPLE who are vulnerable or in a crisis situation —whether due to age, disability, illness, bereavement, or sudden life changes—requires an elevated standard of ethical behaviour. This is increasingly an issue that needs attention when most companies, even quite small ones, are becoming progressively automated and data-driven, with less of a human interface.

Whatever the circumstances, people experiencing trauma in their lives may have reduced confidence, heightened emotional distress or cognitive overload (or limitation) — all of which can lead to reduced decision-making capability. At such times, there is immediately an asymmetry of power and it's important to ensure that commercial incentives do not override a duty of care. At its core, the issue centres on the responsible use of influence: whether a seller uses their expertise to help the customer come to an informed choice or exploits vulnerability to secure a transaction.

A CASE IN POINT FOR SHOWER PODS

For example, at Dignity Access we design and manufacture a high-end range of modular disabled wetrooms. However, we are very much aware that our WashPod™ range may not be the best use of an individual's money if a smaller, cheaper model will be perfectly sufficient and future-proofed for their needs. We have often re-directed enquiries to suppliers who rent their products by the day for very short-term needs or offer step-in showers that meet a less significant need. However, this is not always the case with other suppliers who might push a customer to accept a step-in shower, for example, when there is a likelihood of further mobility decline in the user, making the solution redundant too quickly. Sellers must adopt safeguards that prevent these techniques from becoming manipulative.

The correct approach therefore demands transparency, fairness, and a commitment to safeguarding the dignity and wellbeing of the customer above profit. This will help alter the balance of power by equipping the customer with a more complete understanding of what to consider before they purchase. ➤

1. Key Steps to Achieve Transparency

Firstly, sellers must prioritise honest communication. This includes providing clear explanations of what a product can and cannot do, avoiding exaggerated claims, and ensuring information is accessible for people whose judgements have been impacted by stress or physical trauma. Sellers must strive to understand the customer's true needs and should demonstrate that they are qualified to do so. This could be through a qualification such as Trusted Assessor status, or proven experience in the field.

Ethical communication also involves taking extra care not to exploit urgency. When an individual is in crisis, they may feel the need to make quick decisions, particularly if they're trying to affect change for end-of-life or hospital discharge. Sellers should offer time, patience, and reassurance.

Ethical selling must create value for the customer—ensuring they benefit meaningfully from the purchase. When the primary goal shifts towards exploiting fear, insecurity, or panic, the practice becomes ethically suspect.



2. Fairness and Understanding

Secondly, informed consent is essential in any transaction with a vulnerable individual. Sellers should check that the customer fully understands the product, its cost, ongoing maintenance requirements, and any alternative options. Where appropriate, they should encourage the involvement of carers, family members, or healthcare professionals to ensure the decision is genuinely in the customer's best interest. Clarity about pricing, warranties, and return policies is especially important, as these factors can significantly impact financially stretched households.

3. Duty of Care to Uphold Safeguarding

Thirdly, sellers should uphold a duty of care, recognising that their role includes guiding customers toward solutions that provide independence, safety, and dignity. This is particularly relevant in industries linked to health and personal care, such as accessible bathrooms and equipment.

Companies involved in selling products to vulnerable customers should have an Ethical Selling Policy & Procedure in place and ensure that all members of the sales team understand its importance.

KEEPING DIGNITY AND TRUST TOP OF THE AGENDA

The accessible bathroom equipment sector—including shower pods, level access showers and walk-in baths—serves individuals whose physical or cognitive limitations make bathing challenging. Because these products directly affect personal safety, privacy, and dignity, the ethical stakes are high.

Manufacturers and retailers should begin with rigorous product quality standards. Showers and baths must be robust, hygienic, non-slip, and their level of accessibility, both now and for future situations, made clear. Components should be tested against industry safety benchmarks and products should be certified as fit for purpose for people with mobility issues, balance difficulties, or sensory impairments. ➤

THE ETHICS OF SELLING

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A customer's needs should be properly assessed, preferably by an independent healthcare professional (such as an occupational therapist) or trained assessors. At Dignity Access, we always undertake a comprehensive, site survey for our WashPod™ installations and our experts have Trusted Assessor qualifications or years of experience, so customers can be reassured that their needs are being fully evaluated and met. Our site surveys ensure that the WashPod™ is appropriate for the user's functional needs, home layout, and long-term prognosis.

Furthermore, companies must prioritise user dignity. Bathing is a deeply personal activity, and products should be designed to empower independence wherever possible. This includes thoughtful design elements such as ergonomic seating, easy-reach controls, gentle water pressure systems, privacy features, and options that reduce the need for intimate assistance. Our WashPod™ models have been designed by chartered architects who specialise in inclusive design working with modular experts to ensure that they facilitate easy transfers from wheelchairs or full wheelchair accessibility where possible. There is no need to 'step-in' over a lip, no matter how small the model is.

SUPPORT AND CARE AFTER THE SALE

Finally, ethical sales practice includes post-purchase support. Providers should offer clear installation guidance (as often installation has to be handled by a 3rd party) user training (Dignity Access takes the customer through a Handover Checklist which is also clearly affixed to all WashPod™ models for use by multiple carers if needed), maintenance services, and responsive customer care. Vulnerable users must never be left without help if a critical bathing aid malfunctions.

In conclusion, equipment suppliers selling to vulnerable people need to act with integrity, transparency and restraint. The wellbeing of customers should be prioritised above commercial gain, which will strengthen trust and confidence ensuring that washing solutions, for example, are fit for purpose for those needing support at the most difficult times of their lives.