



Building Together

A guide for building strong client relationships

A good relationship with your client can make or break a building project. Disagreements during builds are common, and if poorly resolved can cause significant stress for everyone.

Nearly 75% of builders surveyed by BRANZ said tension in their relationships with clients affected their mental health, with over half experiencing moderate to high symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Most conflicts can be settled with clear communication and good processes. BRANZ research with builders and clients has uncovered the tension points during a build process and identified key steps to minimise friction.

Use this guide to manage expectations with your client so you're on the front foot from the beginning of every project.

First meeting checklist

A chance to talk about how the relationship will work. Be proactive, clear and realistic so everyone is on the same page.

- ☐ Outline the build process and milestones
- ☐ Agree when and how you'll communicate
- ☐ Agree who will be the key contact
- ☐ Agree how often clients can expect site visits
- ☐ Agree on budgets, and the process for dealing with variations and delays

The essentials

Communication

Clear communication is essential to a healthy client relationship. Clients often want regular contact but being available all hours isn't realistic or healthy for builders. A conversation about when and how you'll communicate helps everyone understand what to expect.

Let clients know:

- Your working hours and availability.
- How often they can expect responses and progress updates.
- How often and how long will client site visits be.

Top tip: Our research shows that successful client relationships often use face-to-face meetings and email to follow up on key points.

Key contact

It's best if there's one designated key contact for the client. Consider your own expectations for contact between clients and subcontractors, and clearly outline these in advance.

The key contact should:

- Be available at agreed times.
- Communicate clearly and proactively.



Site visits

- Explain health and safety for site visits to ensure both client and workers are protected.
- Explain why clients need to be accompanied by project manager or builder on site visits.
- Clarify the process for clients talking to subcontractors.



Changes in the build process

- Explain provisional cost (PC) jobs versus fixed cost. Agree which jobs will be PC. Will you provide an estimate for these? Make sure the client is clear about the process.
- Let them know you'll be in touch if you need to agree a cost variation.
- Be clear about the impact that variations will have on budgets and timeframes.



If things go wrong

Disagreements are common, and it's important to resolve these quickly. Establishing ground rules will give you a better chance of maintaining a positive working relationship.

- What's the process for dealing with unexpected costs or delays?
- What happens if a client identifies a defect? Who does a client talk to?
- How will defects be checked and fixed?



Danger zone: Key tension points



Defects

- For clients, even minor defects can impact their trust and confidence in their builder.
- It's important that defects are acknowledged and the plan to resolve them is communicated.



Site visits

- For clients, accessing the site is important to see how the build is progressing.
- However having unsupervised clients on-site can lead to conflict when the builder isn't there to explain unexpected issues.



Variations & budgets

- Variations to the original plan can affect budgets and timeframes.
- Builders need to explain variations and exclusions early to set realistic cost expectations.

Find out more

Explore BRANZ's builder and client relationship research at branz.co.nz/pubs/research-now/building-sector-wellbeing

We'd love to hear your feedback. **Scan the QR code** to tell us what you think.

