



Complaints Policy and Procedure

Policy Holder	Head of Quality	Policy Number	001
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Purpose and scope

Resources for Autism strives to operate to the highest quality and standards in all our practice. We welcome feedback from individuals and organisations that we work with, including service users, parents and carers, stakeholders and our local communities. Such feedback is invaluable in helping us to evaluate and improve our work.

This Complaints Policy covers all of activities and services, at Resources for Autism

This policy does not relate to situations where Resources for Autism employees have a complaint or grievance. In these circumstances individuals should follow the internal grievance or whistleblowing procedures as outlined in the staff handbook.

This policy relates to service users, relatives of service users, advocates for service users, Trustees, members of the public and any other interested stakeholders.

Objectives

- Provide an accessible, simple framework for listening and responding to all feedback and complaints;
- Ensure that everyone feels able to give both positive and negative feedback in a safe, non-judgemental environment in the knowledge that it will be heard and responded to;
- Create a sense of community and belonging, protecting our service users, parents, staff and trustees from serial, persistent, unsolicited criticism and complaint;
- Ensure that complaints are dealt with consistently, fairly and within clear timeframes;
- Ensure that feedback is monitored and used to improve our services and celebrate success.

Principles

- Take all concerns and complaints seriously
- Encourage resolution of concerns by informal means where appropriate, in the spirit of partnership;
- Resolve all complaints within 28 working days of the complaint being received, keeping people informed of progress;
- Be impartial and non-adversarial
- Ensure that where appropriate, a full and fair investigation of the issue is undertaken

- Ensure that no-one, including service users and staff are penalised for making a complaint in good faith
- Keep a written record, for at least three years, of all formal complaints, the action taken (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld) and at what stage they were resolved;
- Respect confidentiality and data protection of individual complaints
- Provide information regularly to the Senior Management Team and on at least an annual basis to Resources for Autism Trustee Board so that services can be improved.
 - Hold and provide complaints details to interested external bodies such as commissioners or inspectors. ...

What is feedback?

Feedback can be positive or negative and will usually not require a formal response. We expect to receive feedback daily in passing, during phone conversations, via email, through evaluations/, and in writing. All feedback will be considered in the development of our services. Feedback and compliments will be shared with those to whom it relates and recognised organisationally through the SMT and Co-production work or otherwise as appropriate.

What is a complaint?

Sometimes services and activities may not meet the expectations or satisfaction of those involved, and we would expect, from time to time, legitimate concerns to be raised. We encourage these to be raised with staff following the process outlined in this policy so that we can address these quickly and in partnership with you.

How to make a complaint

Individual Wanting to make a complaint



Contact Relevant Head of Service



If Complaint is resolved this is the end of the process

If Complaint is not resolved then write to the Complaints Officer

You will find relevant contact details for these managers in Appendix one

Who do we want? to hear complaints from?

It is really important to RFA to we hear from all concerned parties whatever their relationship is with the organisation. We value the feedback and also feel it is important that all our community are heard and have a chance for resolution.

Children and young people – we are committed to listening to and hearing the voice of our service users, individually and in groups. We take account of children and young people's views in provision of our services, and encourage participation, self-advocacy and independence.

Parent and carers – we value the experience of parents and the input they can provide us with

Key stakeholders and other members of our local communities – partnerships are very important to us.

Who is involved in the process?

The Head of Quality is the designated Complaints Officer and is responsible for ensuring that this policy is followed, and information is recorded properly. The Complaints Officer may nominate a substitute, for example a member of the senior management team if there is appropriate grounds to do so. In the absence of the Head of Quality the CEO will nominate an alternative Complaints Officer.

If a complaint concerns the Head of Quality the CEO will nominate an alternative Complaints Officer.

If a complaint concerns the CEO or a Trustee, the Chair of the Board of Trustees will manage the complaints process.

If a complaint concerns a Chair of the Board of Trustees, the Deputy Chair of the Board of Trustees will manage the complaints process.

If the complaint involves financial loss or the risk of compensation, the matter may be passed to Resources for Autism insurers who may communicate directly with you.

Complaints received anonymously will be recorded and considered, but action may be limited if further information is required to ensure a full and fair investigation. All anonymous complaints will be directed to the Complaints Officer.

How your complaint will be handled

There are four stages to our complaints policy:

- Stage One raising a concern
- Stage Two making a formal complaint
- Stage Three appealing the outcome of a formal complaint
- Stage Four requesting an independent review

Stage One – Raising a concern Resources for Autism aims to resolve concerns quickly and satisfactorily. It is hoped that most complaints can be made and considered on an informal basis. For example, by way of an apology or explanation or by simply providing the service or information requested.

Where it is appropriate to deal with a concern informally, it is important that the relevant member of staff concerned has the first opportunity to resolve the matter quickly and

effectively. This means co-ordinator or head of service level, leaders, play workers or Orange House Staff. This would also include admin or finance based roles

Trustees, Senior Management or the CEO will not become involved in the matter at this stage as it may compromise their role if the concern proceeds to a formal complaint.

All staff members are expected to keep a written record of concerns raised and action taken; including the dates the complaint was received and resolved. It is their responsibility to inform the person who raised a concern of the action taken. This must be passed onto the Complaints Officer for data keeping.

Any concern regarding safeguarding must be immediately reported to a Designated Safeguarding Lead who is not the Complaints Officer. A list of RfA's Designated Safeguarding Leads in each Region is provided in Appendix 2.

Where a concern cannot be resolved informally, or when it would be inappropriate to pursue an informal route, the member of staff should inform the Complaints Officer who will instigate the formal complaints process.

Stage Two – Making a formal complaint

This stage deals with matters that could not be resolved informally or where it would be inappropriate to seek to resolve an issue through informal means.

The Complaints Officer is responsible for this stage of the complaints process but may nominate a substitute to investigate a complaint if there are appropriate reasons for doing so.

The formal complaints process starts when there is sufficient information to begin an investigation and would normally only commence after you have made a complaint in writing. There are some circumstances where it would be inappropriate to wait for a complaint to be received in writing and decision to proceed to an investigation is a matter for the Complaints Officer.

Under the Equality Act 2010, we will accept complaints via other means according to your communication preferences due to disability or neurodiversity

On receipt of a formal complaint, the Complaints Officer will log the complaint on the Central Record of Complaints and issue a Unique Reference Number.

Where the formal complaint process is triggered by a verbal complaint the Complaints Officer will capture the nature of the complaint and ensure this is recorded on the Central Record of Complaints.

All formal complaints will be acknowledged by the Complaints Officer (or the nominated substitute, as described above) within three working days, wherever possible.

The Complaints Officer (or the nominated substitute) is responsible for investigating the formal complaint and will ensure that all information and evidence is captured on the "Complaints Sheet" and that this is logged within the Central Record of Complaints.

Following an investigation, the Complaints Officer (or the nominated substitute) will provide a written response to you within 15 working days. The written response will confirm the outcome of the investigation and what action is being proposed as a result.

A copy of this response will be copied to the relevant Head of Service

The Complaints Officer (or the nominated substitute) will advise you that if you are not satisfied with the response to their complaint, and the action that is being proposed, you may appeal and progress to Stage Three – Appeal.

Stage Three – Appealing the outcome of a formal complaint

If you wish to appeal the outcome of the investigation led by the Complaints Officer, you must write to the CEO of Resources for Autism within 15 working days of receiving the Complaints Officer's written response.

The CEO is responsible for Stage Three of the complaints process. They will review the Stage Two investigation led by the Complaints Officer and will confirm in writing, within 15 days, one of the following actions:

- that no further action is taken by Resources for Autism

OR

- specify changes to the Stage Two written response and actions.

Stage Four – Requesting an independent review

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the appeal you may request an independent review.

Any request must be made in writing to the CEO of Resources for Autism within 15 working days of the CEO reporting on the outcome of an appeal.

It is the discretion of the Chair of the Board of Trustees whether to instigate an independent review. If it is decided that a complaint, or the process by which it has been investigated, warrants further examination, the Chair of the Board of Trustees can establish an Independent Review Panel which will take place at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Chair of Trustees will appoint a panel of at least three people who are not involved in matters detailed in the complaint, including at least one member who is independent of the management and running of the charity

The Panel will meet to review the complaint, and you (the parents) are able to attend this and be represented if you wish. You will be given reasonable notice of the date of the Panel meeting. Representation may include having one relative or friend present to support you. Legal representation will only be permitted if the chair considers it appropriate.

The Panel will confirm in writing one of the following actions:

- no further action is required and the matter is deemed to be closed

OR

- overturn the appeal (Stage Three) and recommend specific actions;

OR

- recommend changes to internal systems and processes to reduce the possibility of similar complaints in the future.

The decision of the Panel will be communicated to you, the complainant, in writing within five working days of a decision being made, and if relevant also to the person being complained about. The decision is final and absolute.

Who else can you talk to?

Parents, Carers and Service users may also take their concerns or complaints to external bodies

You may contact the local authority, usually the one in which you are receiving the service

There are more details in Appendix One about external places to complain

Social Media

Social media should not be used to make or progress a complaint. Complaints should be made through the channels that ensure information is recorded safely and securely and to be sure that the complaint can be progressed in a timely way and in accordance with a set of clear procedures.

If a complaint or allegation refers to a safeguarding, the Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedure or Adult Safeguarding Procedure will be followed. We take all allegations relating to safeguarding very seriously.

In the case of social media being used to express a negative opinion about an aspect of the work of Resources for Autism the following four steps will be taken

Gather evidence: When the charity becomes aware of a negative opinion being expressed through social media channels about any aspect of its work and/or its staff, evidence will be gathered to establish what has been posted on social media and by whom.

Staff will not respond via social media to any postings deemed to be negative. The person (most likely to be a staff member) who identifies the post(s) will inform the Head of Quality or in their absence any member of Senior Leadership Team and CEO as soon as possible.

- **The** CEO, Head of Quality or other appropriate senior staff /member should reassure staff and offer support through whole staff emails, meetings and individual conversations

Reporting offending material and removal : The platform provider will be approached to remove content if it breaches the terms and conditions of the platform. If the content does not breach the terms and conditions of the platform, then the team will hide the post and/or review our settings including around posting to our page, posting about us, tagging.

- **Legal advice:** In cases of malicious allegations, Resources for Autism may seek legal advice. In some cases this may result in a letter from a solicitor being sent to individuals warning that the allegations could result in legal action.

Appendix one

For concerns from members of the public about charities and specific concerns around please contact the Charity Commission:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-charities>

Fundraising complaints

[Contact the Fundraising Regulator](#) to complain about:

- the way you've been asked for donations
- how fundraisers have behaved

You can also complain on behalf of someone else.

Advertising complaints

[Contact the Advertising Standards Authority](#) to complain about:

- an advertising campaign you think is offensive, deceptive or inaccurate
- the amount of emails or mail you get from a charity

You can change how often you get emails, phone calls, texts or post from a charity using the [Fundraising Preference Service](#).

Other serious complaints

Complain to the Charity Commission if a charity is, for example:

- not doing what it claims to do
- losing lots of money
- harming people
- being used for personal profit or gain
- involved in illegal activity

[Make a serious complaint about a charity](#).

There is a different process for reporting serious concerns about charities in [Scotland](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

If you're a trustee or auditor

You can report serious concerns to the Charity Commission about practice or audit or as a trustee

Read [how to report serious wrongdoing at a charity you work for](#).

Only report issues to the Charity Commission that could seriously harm:

- the people a charity helps
- the charity's staff or volunteers
- services the charity provides
- the charity's assets
- the charity's reputation