

Complaints Policy and Procedures

Policy Holder	Head of Behaviour, Quality and Training	Date of Next Review:	May 2027
Last Review Date	16/05/24	Reviewed by:	Emily Rhoades

Introduction:

Resources for Autism strives to operate to the highest quality and standards in all of our practice. We welcome feedback from all, whatever their relationship is with the organisation. We feel it is important that all who interact with Resources for Autism are heard and if necessary, have a chance for resolution. As well as our service users who we endeavour to support we value the experience of parents/carers, and the input can provide us with. Partnerships with, and the wellbeing and satisfaction of key stakeholders and other members of our communities are also very important to us.

All feedback is monitored, appreciated and invaluable in helping us to evaluate and improve our services. We do encourage the resolution of concerns by informal means where appropriate, in the spirit of partnership.

Please note, this policy covers all of Resources for Autism's activities and services however does not apply to Resources for Autism staff. Individuals employed by Resources for Autism should follow the internal procedures for raising concerns and complaints which is outlined in the staff handbook.

Aims of this policy:

- Provide an accessible, clear, and concise framework for submitting a complaint to Resources for Autism.
- Ensure that individuals we interact with feel able to give both positive and negative feedback in a safe, non-judgemental environment in the knowledge that it will be heard, taken on board, and responded to.
- Resolve all complaints within 28 working days of the complaint being received, keeping individuals involved informed of progress.

Our commitment:

- Take all concerns and complaints seriously.
- Ensure that complaints are dealt with consistently, fairly and within clear timeframes.
- 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 individuals submitting complaints.

- Report complaints received promptly to the Senior Management Team and on an annual basis to Resources for Autism Trustee Board so that services can be improved.
- Hold and provide complaints details to interested external bodies which may include relevant commissioners or inspectors.

We hope to create a sense of community and belonging, protecting our service users, parents, staff and trustees from serial, persistent, unsolicited criticism, and complaint.

What is feedback?

Feedback can be positive or negative and will usually not require a formal response. We welcome receive feedback daily in passing, during phone conversations, via email, through evaluations/, and in writing for example. All feedback will be considered in the development of our services. Feedback and compliments will be shared with those to whom it relates to and 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.

Who is involved in the process?

The Head of Quality, Behaviour and Training 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, Behaviour and Training, 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.

Please note, 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 feedback 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:

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. You may contact them directly or, contact the relevant Head of Service by email, in writing or by calling the office. A list of RFA's Heads of Service is provided in Appendix 2.

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.

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.

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 receiving a complaint, 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 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.

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

On receipt of a formal complaint, the Complaints Officer will ensure that all information and evidence is captured, log the complaint on the Central Record of Complaints and issue a Unique Reference Number. All formal complaints will be acknowledged in writing by the Complaints Officer (or the nominated substitute, as described above) within three working days, wherever possible.

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 sent 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 received and the action proposed, you may appeal the decision 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.

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

Stage Four – Requesting an independent review:

A request for an independent review 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 at Stage 3 of the complaints process.

It is at 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 person who has submitted the complaint) are able to attend this and be represented if you wish. Representation may include having one relative or friend present to support you. Legal representation will only be permitted if the chair considers it appropriate. You will be given reasonable notice of the date of the Panel meeting.

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

- No further action is required and the matter is deemed to be closed
- Overturn the appeal (Stage Three) and recommend specific actions;
- 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 who it's the subject of the complaint. This decision is the end of the Resources for Autism complaints process.

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 bodies for more specific complaints.

Social Media

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

In the case of social media being used to express a negative opinion about any aspect of Resources for Autism's work and/or its staff, the following four steps will be taken:

- 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 the Senior Leadership Team and CEO as soon as possible.
- If appropriate and necessary, the CEO, Head of Quality or another appropriate senior staff member may send out communication to the staff team and/or offer support through meetings and/or individual conversations.
- If appropriate and necessary, 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, but contains offensive or misleading content, the team will hide the post and/or review our settings around posting to our page, posting about, and tagging Resources for Autism in posts.
- 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 relevant individuals, informing them that the allegation(s) could result in legal action.

Specific complaints procedures:

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

Please note, the following regulating bodies recommend following the complaints procedure of the organisation in question first (in this case, Resources for Autism), before contacting them. In the rare case that you do not receive a satisfactory response, if your complaint has not been resolved or, if you have not heard back from us following the previously outlined process within 4 weeks, see details and links below.

Fundraising complaints

Contact the Fundraising Regulator (see link [here](#)) to submit a complaint about:

- The way you've been asked for donations.
- Misleading or excessive requests for donations.
- How fundraisers have behaved when asking for donations.
- Your donation has not been handled in line with your wishes.

Advertising complaints

Contact the Advertising Standards Authority (see link [here](#)) to submit a complaint about:

- An advertising campaign you think is offensive, deceptive or inaccurate.
- The amount of emails or mail you get from a charity, or if you have amended your contact preferences and this has not been actioned.

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

Other serious complaints

You can submit a complaint to the Charity Commission ([see link here](#)) if you feel 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.
- Suspected to be involved in illegal activity.

If you're a trustee or auditor

You can report serious concerns to the Charity Commission ([see link here](#)). Serious concerns that can be reported to the Charity Commission may include harm to the people a charity helps, the charity's staff or volunteers, the services the charity provides, the charity's assets or the charity's reputation. Government Guidance around reporting concerns about a charity you work for can be found [here](#).