

# Complaints policy and procedure

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## **1. Why do we have a complaints policy?**

1.1 We welcome feedback on any aspect of our work, including complaints, comments, compliments and suggestions. This policy covers complaints only.

1.2 Comments, compliments and suggestions are welcome through the following:

- You can share thoughts via our feedback form, available from all our services and on [our website](#)
- In person by talking with the relevant manager, team or service staff
- By email to our complaints email address [Complaints@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:Complaints@childrenssociety.org.uk)
- Via telephone to our Supporter Care line on 0300 303 7000
- Via social media

More information and options for contacting us are available on our website <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/about-us/contact-us>

1.3 Whilst we always aim to get things right first time, we know that on occasion we may not. If we make a mistake, we will be open and honest about it as soon as possible. We will tell you about our mistake, explain why we think the mistake was made, and tell you how we will do our best to ensure it doesn't happen again. This applies if you are a child or young person, parent or carer, volunteer, supporter or partner. We will also give you this information in writing.

1.4 If you are thinking about making a complaint, but aren't sure if you want to, talk to any Children's Society member of staff. They can tell you more about how complaints are dealt with.

1.5 The Children's Society is positive about receiving complaints, and views them as an opportunity for us to get things right. We are committed to learning and continuous improvement. We use information about mistakes and complaint information constructively to reflect, learn, monitor and improve our performance.

## **2. Who can complain using this policy?**

2.1 This policy is intended for children and young people who use our services, parents or carers of the children and young people who use our services, our volunteers, partners and supporters, including visitors to our shops

2.2 We tell all the children and young people who use our services, their parents and carers, and our volunteers and supporters about this policy when we begin working together. This policy is also available on our website for anyone to access at [https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/complaints\\_policy.pdf](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/complaints_policy.pdf)

2.3 If you don't want to make a complaint yourself, you can ask someone, such as a parent or friend, to make a complaint on your behalf. First we will need to be sure you have asked them to raise your concern (we will need this in writing from you).

Then, we can talk with them about the complaint and agree the best way to communicate with you (as the complainant) throughout the process. If you are a volunteer, we will not be able to talk about your volunteering role or give any information to another person on your behalf if we do not have your consent to do so.

### **3. What can you complain about?**

- 3.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of the work of The Children's Society.
- 3.2 This policy sets out The Children's Society's process for responding to complaints. The process is intended to be as clear, fair, consistent and timely as possible.
- 3.3 If you are a child or young person receiving support from us today and have concerns about your own safety or protection (safeguarding concerns), please tell a member of staff or manager in your service immediately. You can also give us your details via this email address:

[Safeguarding@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:Safeguarding@childrenssociety.org.uk)

- 3.4 Volunteers with any safeguarding concerns should inform their Volunteer Manager immediately (or that person's manager, if need be), who will follow the organisations safeguarding framework.

### **4. What constitutes a serious complaint?**

The Charity Commission for England and Wales defines a 'serious' complaint as one concerning an action that could cause 'serious risk of harm to the charity or the people it was set up to help'. They provide the following list of such actions -

- a charity not following the law, with damaging consequences to its reputation and public trust in charities generally.
- serious harm to the people the charity helps or other people who come into contact with the charity through its work.
- a person or organisation unlawfully receiving significant financial benefit from a charity.
- criminal, illegal or terrorist activity.
- a charity set up for illegal or improper purposes.
- a charity losing significant amounts of money.
- a charity losing significant assets, for example land or buildings

### **5. What is not covered in this policy?**

- 5.1 This policy is not for Children's Society staff. Staff with a complaint should follow the relevant policy below:
  - Whistleblowing Policy
  - Grievance Policy
  - Safeguarding Children and Young People
  - Safeguarding Adults at risk of abuse
  - Managing allegations of abuse by a staff member or volunteer

- Historic Allegations of Abuse policy.

5.2 Adults who were in the care of The Children's Society as children, and want to make a complaint about historic (past) matters, should follow [this link](#) to our website, where our apology, the specialist help we provide and further information specific to historic matters can be found. This policy does not cover historic issues.

## **6. Key principles of this policy**

- 6.1 We encourage children and young people who use our services, their parents/ carers, our volunteers, partners and supporters to tell us if they aren't happy with our work. We will treat anyone making a complaint with dignity and respect. We will take your concerns seriously
- 6.2 Our policy and procedures about complaints are clear, open and honest. We take extra care to make the complaints process as simple and straightforward as possible for the children and adults we work with.
- 6.3 Complaints will be resolved as swiftly, and as far as possible, informally, by those who are responsible for the relevant area of work. Whenever there is a delay for whatever reason, we will let you know quickly and tell you when you will hear from us next.
- 6.4 Through the implementation of this policy and procedure, we will ensure there is a fair, clear and consistent process which sets out three stages for considering complaints. This includes, as far as possible, a consistent contact person who will update you throughout the process.
- 6.5 We will respect confidentiality throughout the process. Only those involved in looking into the complaint will know about it.
- 6.6 If you need help to make a complaint, please get in touch with us by any of the channels listed in point 1.2 of this policy and we will help you to find the right support needed for you to make your complaint.
- 6.7 If you need extra support as the result of a mistake we have made, we will help you get that support. If we cannot provide the help you need ourselves, we will help you source it elsewhere.
- 6.8 If you decide you want to withdraw your complaint, you can do so at any time.
- 6.9 A complaint about an employee or volunteer working with children, young people or adults at risk may arise via TCS's complaints process. Following an initial Stage 1 investigation (in accordance with TCS's complaints policy and process), the complaint may raise an allegation or concern about potentially harmful behaviour towards a child, young person or adult at risk. Whenever this occurs, the Managing Allegations policy will then take precedence, thereby suspending the complaints process

## 7. How to complain

- You can share thoughts via our feedback form, available from all our services and on [our website](#)
- In person by talking with the relevant manager, team or service staff
- By email to our complaints email address [Complaints@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:Complaints@childrenssociety.org.uk)
- Via telephone to our Supporter Care line on 0300 303 7000
- Via social media

Parents, carers, supporters and partners can make a complaint using the same channels.

Supporter Care team  
The Children's Society,  
Whitecross Studios,  
50 Banner Street,  
London EC1Y 8ST.

Regardless of your method of contact, we will follow the same process.

- 7.1 Volunteers should, in the first instance, raise any complaint with their Volunteer Manager. If the complaint concerns this person, it can be raised with the person the Volunteer Manager reports to. The central Children's Society Volunteering Team receive information about all complaints made by volunteers and are available to help volunteers wanting to make a complaint. They can be contacted via [VolunteeringTeam@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:VolunteeringTeam@childrenssociety.org.uk). Alternatively, volunteers can register their complaint outside the volunteering team, using the complaints email address in 6.2.
- 7.2 People making a complaint may choose to do so via The Children Society social media channels. If a complaint is made in this way it will be managed according to this policy.

## 8. Making sure our complaints policy is effective

- 8.1 We want our complaints policy to be effective. We will monitor and review complaint information to make sure that the correct procedure has been followed.
- 8.2 All complaints will be logged and monitored through a central register, held by us at The Children's Society. The Children's Society Board of Trustees retain oversight of complaints as part of the charity's governance. They will make sure we are learning from complaints and making any necessary changes to the way we work.

- 8.3 This document may be reviewed at any time at the request of management, but will automatically be reviewed every three years or sooner in response to new national guidance and/or legislation.

## **The Children's Society has a three stage complaints procedure**

### **Stage 1: Local resolution**

- Wherever possible, complaints will be resolved swiftly and informally by the relevant manager. If the manager is involved in the complaint, we will ask another independent manager
- Where a safeguarding concern is raised via a complaint process, The Children's Society's Safeguarding Framework will be followed. A staff member will talk about this with you if your complaint involves a safeguarding issue.
- It is our aim that all Stage 1 'local resolution' complaints will be resolved 10 working days after we receive the complaint. If we are unable to resolve the complaint in this timeframe, we will tell you as quickly as possible and let you know when you can expect to hear from us.

### **Stage 2: Appeal**

- If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 complaint, please write to us to tell us why you are unhappy within 14 days of receiving written notification of the Stage 1 outcome.
- A relevant independent staff member (appointed by the Director in charge of the work area) will be assigned to resolve the complaint appeal. This will initially involve considering reasons for the appeal and to decide if further review is required.
- If further review (known as an 'investigation') is required, an investigating officer will be appointed. We aim to complete the investigation as quickly as possible. We will keep you informed as our investigation progresses and tell you how long we estimate the process will take.
- We will give you our decision in relation to the appeal, including any findings and conclusions which led to the decision, in writing.

### **Stage 3: Final Appeal**

- If you remain dissatisfied following a Stage 2 investigation, please tell us in writing that you remain unhappy within 14 days of receiving the written Stage 2 decision notification.
- We will assign a senior manager to consider your appeal as quickly as possible.
- The final appeal stage will involve both a reconsideration of the original complaint and a review of how The Children's Society complaints policy and procedure was applied.
- The outcome of the final appeal will be provided in writing to the complainant (person making the complaint).
- Stage 3 final appeal decisions are final.

## **9. Options after appeal**

- 9.1 The Charity Commission regulates registered charities in England and Wales. They make sure that charities are accountable, well-run and meet their legal obligations. The Commission will receive complaints related to suspected serious abuse or illegal activity at a charity. Further information is available on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) site, using [this link](https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity): <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>
- 9.2 Any Children's Society supporter making a complaint about our fundraising activities, who is dissatisfied with the outcome or response times, can (after four weeks from making an initial complaint) refer their complaint to the Fundraising Regulator via telephone on 0300 999 3407 or web form <https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/complaints/make-complaint>. You can also complain to the Fundraising Regulator if you have a complaint about the way you have been asked for donations or how fundraisers have behaved.
- 9.3 The Information Commissioners Office is The UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest, making people aware about their data protection and information rights. If you have a concern about The Children's Society information rights practices, you can report it directly via telephone on 0303 123 1113 or on their website: <https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>

## **10. Confidentiality, GDPR and data protection**

- 10.1 This policy complies with the requirements of The Equality Act (2010) and is in accordance with The Children's Society commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- 10.2 We will only tell those people involved in resolving your complaint about it. Sometimes we may need to share your complaint or concerns with other individuals to understand the situation fully. If you are a child or young person making a complaint, we will talk with you about any concerns we have for your wellbeing that might make it necessary to tell any other adults.
- 10.3 After the complaint is resolved, we will keep a summary on record, using relevant data protection protocols. If you use our services and have a file, the complaint record will be placed on your file.
- 10.4 We use anonymised information from complaints to make sure we learn and improve our services.

## Appendix A: Complaints process flowchart

