



Acorn Pregnancy Counselling Centre - Complaints Policy

Purpose of the policy

Acorn Pregnancy Counselling Centre (Acorn) is committed to providing the best possible service to clients and in schools and has policies in place setting out our high standards to ensure that everyone is happy with their Acorn experience.

However, there may be occasions when someone believes we have failed to meet these standards and the purpose of this policy is to:

- Demonstrate that Acorn takes complaints very seriously
- Define how we will respond to any complaints so that they can be resolved to everyone's satisfaction as quickly as possible
- Ensure that complaints are handled in an open, effective, consistent and appropriate manner
- Ensure that all complainants are treated with respect throughout the process and client confidentiality* maintained throughout
- Ensure that we learn from complaints and make any necessary improvements

Scope of the policy

This policy outlines the procedure for dealing with complaints from people to whom Acorn delivers a service (clients, schools).

For complaints about matters such as Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Data Protection, volunteer or staff issues, please see separate policies.

***Confidentiality and records**

In order to satisfactorily respond to the complaint, it will be necessary for an investigation into the situation and records kept of conversations and correspondence. Records will be anonymised wherever possible and only shared within Acorn on a need to know basis. (The GDPR basis for processing and storing this information is *legitimate interest*.)

Acorn client confidentiality will be maintained throughout; however, other people may need to be contacted during the investigation should they be involved in some way and the complainant will be advised accordingly.

Making a complaint

Stage 1 Informal complaint

We ask clients (or schools) to raise a concern informally with their Member of the Counselling Team (or the School's Team leader) when it arises. In the majority of cases, it will be possible to resolve the matter during the ensuing discussion. However, if this is not the case it should be brought to the attention of the Centre Manager as soon as possible. If the Centre Manager is not available or named in the complaint, then a trustee.

He/she will try to find a resolution to the issue and advise the complainant accordingly.

If the Centre Manager is unable to resolve the matter in a way the complainant is happy with, then the complainant can put the complaint in writing for investigation at Stage 2.

Stage 2 Written complaint

The written complaint (letter or email) will be investigated by a trustee.

Full complainant information - Written complaints must include the full name, phone number and email address of the complainant, together with a full summary of the complaint issues. The complaint cannot be investigated without this and the complaint investigation will be delayed until it is received.

Once received, the trustee will investigate the complaint informally and endeavour to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all parties. He/she will consider whether there has been any breach of Acorn policies or constitution. The aim of the investigation is to produce a resolution of the areas of disagreement between the parties involved.

The trustee will send a written response to the complainant by email.

Before a formal complaint (Stage 3) is reached, a complainant will be encouraged to resolve the issue with the trustee at Stage 2.

Stage 3 Formal complaints panel

If complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, he/she can request a formal complaints panel: at least two trustees to formally examine the situation with the complainant present, if desired. These trustees will not be directly involved in the complaint, if that is possible. The Chair of trustees would normally chair this meeting.

The panel will endeavour, in the first instance, to identify the areas of agreement and disagreement of the parties involved to be recorded.

A brief written submission will be required from both the complainant and person(s) complained about before the panel meet. This will be used as the basis for the outcome, if the complainant chooses not to be present.

The complainant may wish to be accompanied by a person to support them when being interviewed by the panel.

The complainant will be notified of the conclusion during the meeting, if he/she is present.

If the complainant is a counsellor or counselling client they could contact the BACP
<https://www.bacp.co.uk/>

Expenses - Acorn will not be held responsible for any expenses incurred during complaint investigation.

Timing

Complainants should be aware that the Centre Manager works part time and the trustees are all volunteers, but it is important to deal with complaints as swiftly as possible. We have set the following targets:

Stage 1

Centre Manager (or representative) will communicate with the parties involved within 10 working days of receiving the complaint and advise the outcome within 21 days.

If action needs to be taken Acorn will do this within 28 days of resolution.

Stage 2

Acorn will acknowledge receipt of the written complaint and/or request full complainant information within 5 working days.

The trustee will initiate the investigation within 14 days of receipt of full complainant information.

The trustee will respond to the complainant within 28 days, either with a full response or to report progress.

The trustee will endeavour to conclude all stages of the process within 56 days.

Stage 3

Acorn will acknowledge receipt of the request for a formal complaints panel within 5 working days.

The panel chair will set the date of the meeting within 56 days.

If the complainant is absent, the panel chair will advise the conclusion within 2 working days.

See also: Safeguarding Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Data Protection

The above Complaints Policy was adopted by the Trustees at a meeting on 12 August 2020.