

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Families Forward is committed to providing the best possible service to the families with whom we work, and we try to listen to what they need. We acknowledge, however, that there will be occasions when people may not be happy with some aspect of our provision. This policy exists to make it easier for you to tell us when you are unhappy, or indeed when you have any comment to make about Families Forward. All complaints will be taken seriously and we aim to treat you with respect and consideration throughout the complaints process.

1. What kind of circumstances may give rise to a complaint?

- ☐ You believe you have been treated unfairly on the grounds of your gender/race/religion/age/sexuality or for any similar reason
- ☐ You feel that we have failed to provide information about Families Forward or its services
- ☐ You feel that we have failed to provide a key service
- ☐ You feel you have experienced an unreasonable delay in receiving a service
- ☐ You feel that a service provided has been inadequate
- ☐ You believe that our staff have been rude or unhelpful
- ☐ You disagree with a decision we have made or a policy we operate

The time limit for complaints once work has ceased with a family will be in line with the organisation's retention of information policy in relation to the type of work undertaken. Where the work has been for an externally commissioned service (eg CAFCASS), the Complaints Procedure for that commissioned service will be used.

2. What should I do to complain informally?

You can make your complaint to the member of staff concerned, or to any line manager. Any worker will be pleased to tell you who is the most appropriate person to approach. This may be done in person, or by telephone or email. We aim to listen to what you have to say, to apologise whenever necessary, and to try to agree a solution with you. We will try to deal with your complaint to your satisfaction immediately; however, there will be occasions when this may not be possible (for example during holiday periods). If there will be a delay in responding to your complaint you will be told, and we will reply as quickly as possible, either verbally or in writing if you wish. If you remain dissatisfied with us or with our response you should use the formal procedure outlined below.

3. What should I do to make a formal complaint?

You may use the formal complaints procedure at any time: you do not have to complain informally first if you believe that your complaint is too serious for that approach.

You should feel free to obtain assistance with writing your complaint if you need it; such assistance could be given by a friend or family member, a Citizens Advice Bureau or Advocacy group or a similar organisation. You may use the attached form to submit your complaint, or on a separate piece of paper. This can be then submitted in one of the following ways:

Hand deliver to our Leeds or Bradford Centres during opening hours	Please mark your envelope 'Private and Confidential', for the attention of the Complaints Officer
By post to our Leeds Centre	
By email to: complaints@familiesforward.org.uk	

4. What will happen after I complain?

Families Forward will aim to acknowledge receipt of your formal complaint within five working days; this will be done by letter and/or email, so it is important that you provide us with the correct postal and email address. This letter will also tell you what steps will need to be taken to investigate your complaint: dependent on the circumstances of the complaint, we may ask you to meet with us to discuss the problem (in which case you are welcome to be accompanied by a person of your choice from outside Families Forward), and we may allocate responsibility for this meeting and the subsequent investigation to the appropriate line manager. If your complaint is about a member of staff, it will be passed immediately to the appropriate line manager; the Complaints Officer will write to you to tell you that this has been done and to explain that our internal inquiry process has begun. We aim to resolve all complaints quickly. You will receive a full written response, usually within 28 working days; if there will be any further delay, you will be informed. This letter will include information on what to do if you are still dissatisfied.

5. Will my complaint be confidential?

Your complaint may be seen by managers or Board members of Families Forward as part of the investigation process but we will make every effort to safeguard your privacy; your complaint will not become 'public knowledge' unless you so wish. You should be aware, however, that if your complaint is specifically about a member of staff or a Board Member of Families Forward, it will be necessary for that person to be told that a complaint has been lodged against him/her, to allow the investigation to proceed.

6. What if I am still unhappy – can I appeal?

You can appeal if you are unhappy about the way that the complaints procedure has been conducted. Please state clearly which aspect of the procedure you think we have got wrong, and why. You cannot go directly to the appeal stage unless you have used the first stage of the procedure. If you wish to appeal, this should be done in writing, either by email or by letter, and this should be submitted to Families Forward by the means listed above. However, please indicate on the envelope "Private and Confidential: for the attention of the Chair of the Board". Again, you can obtain assistance with this, as explained above.

7. What will happen if I appeal?

You will receive written acknowledgement of your appeal usually within five working days, along with information as to when and how it will be dealt with. A panel (consisting of the Chair of the Board and at least one other member) will normally be formed to consider your appeal. You may attend this meeting (bringing a person of your choice from outside Families Forward, if you wish), or make written comments if you would prefer. Your appeal and the original complaint will be considered in detail, and you will receive a written response within 28 working days of the hearing. Families Forward will make every effort to comply with the decision or recommendations of the appeal panel.

8. What if I am still dissatisfied following an appeal?

The appeal stage is the final internal one as far as Families Forward are concerned. If you remain unhappy, you are entitled to contact your local councillor or MP. You are, of course, entitled to do this directly without using our complaints procedure at all, although obviously we would encourage you to tell us first and allow us to try to resolve matters if you are unhappy.

9. NACCC's (National Association of Child Contact Centres) role in complaints handling

As a membership organisation NACCC has no responsibility for the staff or day to day running of member centres; however, NACCCV advises, supports and accredits centres and requires them to work to the highest standards. Whilst Families Forward is a member of the NACCC organisation, we are independently managed and run.

NACCC will not therefore, be able to investigate any complaint in detail, they will only look at whether Families Forward has handled the complaint in line with our own Complaints Policy. NACCC will not comment on the outcome of the complaint, conclusions will solely be based upon how well the policy was followed.

If you wish to ask NACCC to investigate our application of the Complaints Policy, please contact us and we will link you with a staff member at NACCC who will take you through the process and provide you with the necessary forms and information.

If NACCC concludes that Families Forward has not followed its own policy, they may ask us to look again at the way in which we handled the complaint. However, this may not alter our decision.

10. **What should I do if I wish to praise Families Forward, or just make a suggestion or comment about something?**

Families Forward welcomes all comments and suggestions, and tries to take account of these where possible when planning work, etc. Please feel free to write to us, telephone, fax or email, or use the review process for your work.

Agreed	February 2025
By	Families Forward Board
Next review date	February 2026