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FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Complaints Handling in Care Settings

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 045

Version 1.0

First Published: August 2026



www.flexilearnhub.com

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Introduction

Complaints are an important part of improving health and social care services. Every individual has the right to raise a concern if they are unhappy with the care or support they receive, and they should feel confident that their complaint will be listened to fairly, taken seriously and handled respectfully.

Care staff are often the first people to hear concerns from individuals, relatives or visitors. Responding calmly, professionally and with empathy can help resolve issues quickly, prevent misunderstandings and maintain positive relationships.

A positive approach to complaints encourages openness, supports learning and helps organisations continually improve the quality and safety of the care they provide.

Why This Resource Matters

Understanding complaints handling helps care staff to:

- Recognise the importance of listening to concerns.
 - Respond professionally, calmly and respectfully to complaints.
 - Promote openness, honesty and person-centred care.
 - Understand their role in reporting and escalating concerns.
 - Help resolve issues at an early stage where appropriate.
 - Support continuous improvement in the quality of care.
 - Meet legal, regulatory and professional responsibilities.
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Key Message

Every complaint is an opportunity to improve. By listening carefully, responding respectfully and following your organisation's complaints procedures, you help build trust, protect individuals' rights and contribute to safer, higher-quality, person-centred care.

Understanding Complaints Handling

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the care, treatment or service provided. Complaints may come from individuals receiving care, family members, advocates or other people acting on an individual's behalf.

Complaints should always be taken seriously. They provide valuable feedback that can help improve services, prevent similar issues from happening again and ensure individuals receive safe, high-quality care.

Care staff should never ignore, dismiss or argue with someone who wishes to raise a concern. Instead, they should listen carefully, remain calm and follow their organisation's complaints procedure.

Responding to Concerns Professionally

When someone raises a complaint, care staff should:

- Listen without interrupting.
- Remain calm, respectful and professional.
- Show empathy and acknowledge the person's concerns.
- Avoid becoming defensive or argumentative.
- Explain what will happen next in line with your organisation's complaints procedure.
- Report the complaint promptly to the appropriate manager or person responsible.
- Record the concern accurately and factually where required.

Not every concern can be resolved immediately, but every complaint deserves to be treated fairly, respectfully and without discrimination.

Remember

Complaints are an opportunity to learn and improve. By responding professionally, listening carefully and following the correct procedures, you help build trust, improve the quality of care and ensure individuals feel valued, respected and heard.

Professional Responsibilities

Every member of care staff has a responsibility to treat complaints seriously and respond in a professional, respectful and compassionate manner. A positive approach to complaints helps protect individuals' rights, promotes openness and supports continuous improvement in the quality of care.

As a care professional, you should:

- Listen carefully to concerns without interrupting.
 - Treat every individual with dignity, respect and empathy.
 - Remain calm, polite and professional at all times.
 - Follow your organisation's complaints policy and procedures.
 - Report complaints promptly to the appropriate manager.
 - Record complaints accurately, factually and confidentially.
 - Never ignore, dismiss or discourage someone from raising a concern.
 - View complaints as opportunities to improve the quality of care and service delivery.
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When to Raise Concerns

You should speak to your manager immediately if:

- A complaint involves potential abuse, neglect or safeguarding concerns.
- An individual is at immediate risk of harm.
- A complaint relates to unsafe care or professional misconduct.
- You are unsure how to respond to a complaint.
- The complaint cannot be resolved appropriately at your level.
- You identify repeated complaints about the same issue that may indicate a wider problem within the service.

Always follow your organisation's reporting procedures and never attempt to conceal mistakes or complaints. Being open and honest helps protect individuals and supports a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

Good Practice Reminder

Everyone has the right to express concerns about the care they receive. By listening respectfully, responding professionally and following the correct complaints procedures, you help build trust, improve services and ensure every individual feels valued, listened to and treated with dignity.

Summary

Complaints are an important source of feedback and play a vital role in improving the quality, safety and effectiveness of health and social care services. Every individual has the right to raise concerns and expect them to be handled fairly, respectfully and without fear of discrimination.

Care staff have a responsibility to listen carefully, respond professionally, report concerns promptly and follow their organisation's complaints procedures. By treating complaints positively, you help build trust, improve services and promote safe, person-centred care.

Complaints Handling Checklist

- ✓ Listen carefully and respectfully to every concern.
 - ✓ Remain calm, professional and empathetic.
 - ✓ Never ignore, dismiss or argue with someone making a complaint.
 - ✓ Follow your organisation's complaints policy and procedures.
 - ✓ Report complaints promptly to the appropriate manager.
 - ✓ Record complaints accurately, factually and confidentially.
 - ✓ Treat complaints as opportunities to improve care and services.
 - ✓ Raise safeguarding concerns immediately where appropriate.
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Further Information

For further guidance on complaints handling in health and social care, visit:

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

<https://www.cqc.org.uk>

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

<https://www.lgo.org.uk>

NHS England – Complaints

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/contact-us/complaint/>

GOV.UK – Health and Social Care Guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/health-and-social-care>

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