

1.7 EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS AND SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Section I

Article 1: Statement of Principle and Statutory Rights

1.1. Autism Dogs Charity (the "Charity") operates under a mandate of professional accountability. This Policy establishes the formal framework for the receipt, investigation, and resolution of external grievances.

1.2. The procedures established herein do not limit or inhibit the statutory rights of any individual to report concerns to relevant authorities, including the Police or the Charity Commission. It is the sole responsibility of the complainant to verify current contact details and protocols for any authority, including the **Charity Commission** (Charity No: 1199343), prior to engagement.

1.3.1. This Policy does not affect a complainant's right to initiate formal legal proceedings. The Charity strongly recommends that any individual considering a formal complaint or claim consult with a solicitor.

1.3.2. You can find a solicitor by visiting the Law Society's website (<https://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk/>). You can check if you are eligible for legal aid here (<https://www.gov.uk/legal-aid>). Complainants are signposted to **Citizens Advice** (www.citizensadvice.org.uk) for free and confidential guidance.

1.3.3. The Charity assumes no liability for the quality of third-party services. The Charity advises complainants to do their own research in all the representation options available to them, sources of funding of legal fees, solicitors in their area and legal charities in their area that might be able to help with legal representation.

1.4. It remains the sole responsibility of the complainant to verify the most current contact details and submission protocols for any third-party authority prior to engagement.

1.5. The Charity provides signposting to external regulatory bodies, legal advice centers, and medical professionals purely as a courtesy to assist the complainant in navigating this process.

1.6. The Charity assumes no responsibility or liability for the accuracy, availability, or quality of services provided by these third-party organizations.

1.7. It is the sole and exclusive responsibility of the complainant to independently verify the current contact details, jurisdictional authority, and specific submission protocols of any external body prior to engagement.

1.8. A complaint procedure is initiated by contacting the Charity at (info@autismdogs.co.uk) as well as contacting the Charity's CEO Caroline Preston at (caroline.preston@autismdogs.co.uk).

Article 2: Governance and Independent Oversight

2.1. The Charity formally acknowledges the family relationship between **Caroline Preston (CEO)**, and **Andrew Preston (independent Training Consultant)**, and **Tate Crossley (Trustee)**.

2.2. Any complaint regarding the conduct or decisions involving these three individuals shall be transferred immediately to the **Chair of the Board of Trustees** for independent oversight.

Article 3: Safeguarding and Emergency Reporting

3.1. In cases involving immediate risk of harm or suspected criminal activity, individuals must contact the **Police** immediately (999 or 101).

3.2. General safeguarding concerns should be directed to the lead Safeguarding Officer, **Caroline Preston**. If the concern involves the CEO, the report must be directed to the **Chair of the Board of Trustees**.

Article 4: Regulatory Reporting

4.1. Complainants may report serious issues to the **Charity Commission for England and Wales** (www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity).

4.2. Charity identifiers: **Autism Dogs Charity**, Registered Charity Number: **1199343**, Registered Office: **Millpool Farm, Wards Lane, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 3LN**.

4.3. In case of a change in the Charity's address, name or Trustees, the Complainant can verify the Charity's identifiers by visiting its Charity Commission page. During February 2026 the page was found in this link ([here](#))

Section II

Article 5: Financials, Conduct, and Anti-Leverage Provisions

5.1. These procedures shall not be leveraged to extract unauthorized payments or seek favourable contractual treatment.

5.2. The Charity operates a strict **No Refund Policy** regarding assessment and training fees. Financial compensation is only considered in exceptional circumstances where the Charity is clearly at fault and has failed to meet the standards of "satisfactory quality" or "fitness for purpose" as defined by the **Consumer Rights Act 2015**.

5.3. By submitting a formal complaint, the complainant agrees to maintain professional conduct and strictly refrains from harassing reviewers, investigators, or any other member of Charity staff.

5.4. The welfare of an animal, social media disparagement, or the threat of reporting to third parties as leverage to extract payments is strictly prohibited.

5.5. **Limitation of Liability:** In accordance with of the Conditions, the Charity is not responsible for the loss of the Handler's or the Representative's emotional well-being.

Article 6: Animal Welfare and Without-Prejudice Payments

6.1. The Charity may, at its absolute discretion, issue localized goodwill payments for the exclusive purpose of facilitating the retrieval of an animal where the Charity harbours a bona fide concern for said animal's welfare.

6.2. Any refund or goodwill payment issued by the Charity is made strictly "**without prejudice**" and does not constitute an admission of liability, negligence, or breach of contract.

6.3. In instances where the client's fees were sourced, in whole or in part, via crowdfunding, charitable grants, or third-party benefactors, the Charity shall not issue a bulk refund directly to the client.

6.4. To maintain fiscal integrity and donor intent, the Charity shall reallocate any agreed-upon refund to the original contributors in a **proportionate manner** based on their initial percentage of contribution.

6.5. Illustrative Example of Proportionate Reallocation:

1. If a total fee of £4,000 was comprised of £2,000 from Donor A (50%), £1,000 from Donor B (25%), and £1,000 from the Client (25%);
2. And the Charity issues a "without prejudice" goodwill refund of £400;
3. The sum shall be distributed as follows: £200 (50%) directly to Donor A, £100 (25%) to Donor B, and £100 (25%) to the Client.

6.6. The complainant is required to provide verified banking details for all original donors to facilitate these transfers. The Charity reserves the right to withhold the issuance of any such funds until the proportionate distribution can be accurately verified against the original source of funds.

Article 7: Evidentiary and Contractual Requirements

7.1. Formal complaints must be accompanied by comprehensive evidentiary documentation, including visual and audio evidence (video recordings) and complete communication logs with trainers, where appropriate.

7.2. Success of a complaint is contingent upon the complainant demonstrating full compliance with the Service Agreement, including following trainer instructions in good faith, attending remedial sessions, and fulfilling bonding and welfare requirements.

7.3. **Contractual Good Faith:** Success of a grievance is contingent upon the family demonstrating they have fulfilled all obligations under their Contract with the Charity. This includes following trainer instructions in good faith, attending all remedial and therapy sessions, and ensuring the dog was not overexposed to traumatic experiences (such as violent shutdowns) earlier than instructed.

7.4. The family must prove they provided the animal with sufficient activities, enrichment, and bonding time, and adhered to the Charity Protocols and Instructions regarding diet, exercise, and socialisation.

Article 8: Mental Health and Physical Well-being during the Process

8.1. The Charity recognizes that the complaint process can be distressing. Complainants are responsible for securing appropriate mental health support and consulting professionals as necessary.

8.2. **Health Warning:** If any member of the family has a pre-existing health condition—including but not limited to high blood pressure, a history of stroke, risk of heart attack, or suicidal ideation—they should not be exposed to the complaint process. Such individuals should not read responses or documents related to the complaint.

8.3. In cases of health vulnerability, the family is advised to appoint a solicitor or a lawfully authorized third party to pursue the complaint on their behalf. The family remains solely responsible for seeking relevant medical and mental health support as it navigates this process.

Section III

Article 9: Resolution Timelines and Appeals

9.1. The Charity shall acknowledge a written complaint within **five (5) working days**.

9.2. A formal investigation shall typically be completed within **thirty (30) working days**. If a secondary review is required, reviewers may take up to an additional **thirty (30) working days** to finalize the findings.

9.3. If the complainant is not satisfied with the final determination, they may submit an appeal. This appeal will be reviewed by the **CEO** or the **Chair of the Board of Trustees**, as appropriate to the nature of the grievance within 30 working days.

On Behalf of Autism Dogs Charity

CEO

Caroline Preston

Chair of the Board of Trustees

Tom Wilde