

Complaints Policy Procedure

We aim to always provide a service with integrity and care. We would like to know if you are not satisfied with our service. At Soundly Fostering, we view complaints, comments and compliments as an opportunity to improve our services. We are committed to resolving any worries or concerns and to finding a positive outcome.

Regulations and Standards

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011

Regulation 18 – Independent fostering agencies: representation and complaints

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards

Standard 1 – The child’s wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them

Standard 21.11 – Information about the procedures for dealing with complaints and representations is widely available

Training and Development Standards

Standard 2 – Understand your role as a foster carer

Standard 4 – Know how to communicate effectively

At Soundly Fostering, it is our policy that no person who is the subject of a complaint takes part in its consideration, other than if the registered manager considers it appropriate at the informal or local stage.

We will ensure that no individual will suffer discrimination, disadvantage, withdrawal or reduction of a service as a result of making a complaint.

This complaints procedure will be made known to any child placed by the agency, their parents/guardians and any persons working for the purposes of the agency (e.g. staff (employed or independent), carers, prospective carers, those enquiring about becoming a foster carer and local authorities, etc.).

Who Can Make a Complaint?

A child, a parent or carer of a child, a foster carer or any person or organisation for whom the agency provides a service, can make a complaint. If necessary, someone else can act on behalf of the person who wants to complain.

Anyone making a complaint is also able to withdraw their complaint at any stage.

- If a fostered child wishes to make a complaint, they will be sympathetically and actively supported to do so, whether the complaint is about the agency or the placing authority. If there is an informal way forward, which can help to resolve things easily and quickly, this will be supported in the first instance.
- The children's welcome and information book clearly outlines the steps to take if making a complaint, and also how to access an independent advocate. The child may ask an adult (foster carer/social workers etc) for help with this at any stage.
- Children will be encouraged to pursue complaints and will be enabled to make a representation.
- Children making complaints must be reassured that there will be no reprisals taken against them. They must also be assured that their complaints will be taken seriously and that they will be notified of the outcome.

What Can Be Complained About?

- An unresolved problem
- The quality of service
- The delivery or non-delivery of a service
- The way in which a person feels they have been treated
- Discrimination

All serious complaints about a foster carer approved by the agency will be reported to the regulatory authority.

If a child or carer is unhappy about a change in their care plan or their placement plan, this should be brought to the attention of their allocated social worker, who may be able to resolve the matter. Alternatively, the independent reviewing officer may be contacted.

It is the role of the independent reviewing officer to make sure that the child who is looked after is aware of the local authority's complaints procedure, which must comply

with the Children Act 1989 and associated regulations, and to assist the child to access independent support and advice to enable them to use this procedure, if they wish to do so.

Can I Get Help To Complain?

Sometimes children and adults need help and support to make a complaint.

Generally, when making a complaint, the following will be taken into consideration:

- Who is your complaint against?
- What is your complaint about?
- What would you like to see happen to resolve the issue?
- The child may have support from their parent, social worker, independent advocate or foster carer. The child who wishes to make a complaint about any aspect of their care should receive assistance and access to independent advice and support from their independent reviewing officer.
- Foster carers may enlist the help of a supporter or advocate, or their supervising social worker as appropriate, to make a complaint about the agency under this procedure, or where appropriate, about the placing authority under the relevant local authority's complaints procedure.

The Complaints Stages

All parties will aim to resolve an issue as quickly and informally as possible. Individuals are encouraged to try to resolve matters informally, in consultation with their supervising social worker or manager.

If an informal resolution cannot be reached, staff will be happy to guide the complainant through the complaints procedure. Guidance will be given as to whether it is more appropriate for the complaint to be directed to the local authority with responsibility for the child's placement, under the Local Authority's complaints procedure.

Stage One

To be resolved at the local level, in the form of a meeting between the complainant and the supervising social worker and/or manager, once the complaint has been received in writing or recorded by other means of communication.

A letter of resolution or outcome will be issued in response to stage one complaints by the fostering manager, including details of how the matter was investigated, by whom and with the relevant facts to support the outcome.

Stage Two

This stage will be activated if the complainant is not completely satisfied with the outcome of stage one, or if they require the matter to be dealt with by someone other than the manager, possibly an independent person who is not employed by the agency.

The complainant must put their complaint in writing to the fostering manager, who will contact the complainant within 7 working days to advise that they have passed this to the service manager or instructed an independent complaints investigating officer in relation to the complaint and will advise them of their name and the expected time-frame for the investigation.

A report will be completed following the investigation, detailing how the matter was investigated, by whom and what outcome was reached, with the relevant evidence to support the report's conclusion.

Stage Three

The final stage of the complaints process is to be undertaken if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the stage two investigation. This must be confirmed to one of the Directors of Soundly Fostering, in writing, including the reasons for their dissatisfaction. They will undertake to arrange for the case to be reviewed by an independent panel within 30 days.

The Panel will be made up of:

- A fostering panel member
- The responsible individual
- A manager or staff member of the service
- An independent individual of such background and experience as required
- A chairperson, if none of the above can fulfil that role

No person implicated in a complaint, or a relative or close association of theirs, may sit on the panel or be involved in any investigation. The panel will be constituted in such a way as to afford true, independent appraisal of the complaint.

The panel will consider the documentation available in relation to the complaint and any further written representations that the complainant wishes to make in relation to the investigation. The panel will reach a decision/recommendation within 24 hours of meeting, and the complainant will be advised of the outcome, in report form, to include any actions in order to resolve the situation within 7 days.

Other Important Contacts

The Children's Commissioner for England

Telephone: 0844 800 9113

Website: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate, 26-32 Store Street
Manchester, M1 2WD

Telephone: 08456 404040

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk