Guest Complaint Escalation

RESTAURANT OPERATIONS SOP • GM / AGM • ALL MSG HOSPITALITY CONCEPTS

PURPOSE Respond with urgency, professionalism, ownership, and proper documentation. Protect the guest relationship, correct the issue where possible, and record facts without arguing about fault.

1 When to involve the GM

Escalate immediately for food safety or allergy concerns, injury, intoxication, discrimination, harassment, threats, police involvement, substantial refund requests, severe service failures, or social media/review risks. Servers should notify managers early; managers must approach calmly, introduce themselves, and listen without interruption.

2 Use the L.A.S.T. response method

LISTEN	Allow the guest to explain; interrupt only for immediate safety concerns.
ACKNOWLEDGE	Validate frustration without automatically admitting liability. “I understand why that would be frustrating.”
SOLVE	Offer a reasonable solution consistent with issue severity, policy, and guest experience.
THANK	Thank the guest for raising the concern and confirm next steps.

3 Manager language and service recovery

- Own the response: “I am going to take care of this.” If more time is needed, promise a personal update and return promptly.
- Avoid blame (“the kitchen messed up,” “your server is new,” “we are short-staffed”) and argumentative phrases (“actually,” “that is not our fault”).
- Use compensation to repair a genuine failure, not to silence every complaint. Consider remakes, comps, or refunds based on the actual impact and approval policy; document every adjustment.

4 Serious incident response

Allergy / food safety	Stop service of the item, notify kitchen leadership, preserve relevant details, document thoroughly, and escalate to required leadership.
Injury / slip or fall	Provide assistance, do not admit fault, gather facts, complete an incident report, preserve available video, and escalate immediately.
Intoxication / aggression	Prioritize safety, involve another manager or security if available, follow alcohol service standards, and document facts.

5 Documentation requirements

Record date/time; guest name/contact if available; table and server; items involved; guest concern; manager response; compensation/refund; witnesses; and needed follow-up. Write observable facts, not judgments (e.g., “Guest raised voice, declined replacement, requested refund”).

Escalation, Practice & Sign-Off

6 Complaint escalation levels

LEVEL 1 Server + awareness	Minor service issue: missing water, small delay, simple remake.
LEVEL 2 Manager	Wrong entrée, cold food, long delay, unhappy guest, billing issue, large-party concern.
LEVEL 3 GM / senior leader	Allergy, illness claim, injury, intoxication, harassment, discrimination, threat, police, social media risk, refund dispute.
LEVEL 4 Specialist escalation	Ownership / HR / legal / insurance may be needed for serious injury, alleged foodborne illness, violence, employee misconduct, repeated guest harassment, chargeback threat.

7 Manager training: demonstrate during live service

- Trainer explains the standard, models a response, and observes the trainee lead after shadowing a strong manager.
- Use real shift examples and connect the response to guest experience, sales, labor, quality, and staff accountability.
- Complete a live demonstration and written follow-up notes. Sign off only after consistent execution on shift.

8 Practice scenarios

- Guest says an allergy concern was not taken seriously: demonstrate immediate response and escalation.
- Guest finished an entrée and requests that the full check be comped: respond respectfully within approval standards.
- Guest posts a negative review while still onsite: recover in person and document follow-up.

9 Common failure points

Arguing before listening • Blaming team members or staffing • Over-compensating without addressing root cause • Failing to document or escalate serious incidents

10 GM demonstration checklist

☐ Approach promptly and introduce yourself as manager.

☐ Listen fully; acknowledge concerns without arguing or blaming staff.

☐ Offer an appropriate solution based on severity and policy.

☐ Document complaint, action, and any comp/discount/refund.

☐ Escalate serious incidents immediately to the correct leader.

Trainer sign-off

Manager name: _____ Trainer name: _____

Date completed: _____ Follow-up notes: _____

Training is complete only after the manager demonstrates consistent performance on shift.