



Complaints Policy and Procedures

First Steps Surrey Child Contact Centre aims to provide families and referrers with the best possible service. We value openness and honesty; your opinions, comments and suggestions are always very welcome. Sometimes, however, we may get things wrong, and you have a right to express your concerns and / or make a complaint. We view complaints as an opportunity to learn and to improve our services, as well as a chance to put things right for the person who has made the complaint.

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents that have used the Centre. Any person, including those who have been unable to use the Centre's services, may make a complaint to the Manager / Coordinator, Kerri Rogers about any provision of facilities or services that we provide.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

It is in everyone's interest that minor concerns and more serious complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. First Steps Surrey Child Contact Centre takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, First Steps Surrey Child Contact Centre's Manager / Coordinator, Kerri Rogers, will handle the concern.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, First Steps Surrey Child Contact Centre will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

Often the concern may be something that is covered on the centre's website or in the information received before contact sessions. It is helpful to check this before raising a formal complaint. If this does not assist and you are still concerned, please contact Manager / Coordinator, Kerri Rogers.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

Where you are unhappy about something, concerns should be shared verbally with a staff member at the centre. Often the complaint will be concluded at this point, if the Centre can assist you or explain the situation. If not, the Centre will take you through the complaints procedure.



Important Considerations

Before making a complaint to a First Steps Surrey Child Contact Centre, consider the following:

It is important to understand that child contact centres may not always be able to offer you what you want and in particular:

- Centres may have waiting lists which mean sessions are not available when the parent wants or in some cases, at all.
- Not all centres can offer all types of contact (supported and supervised). A centre may therefore not accept a parent because they are not equipped to cover the contact needed.
- Where a centre is required to provide Court with a report, the report has to be independent. This means that parents are unlikely to have input into it and may not agree with everything in the report. If a parent is concerned by anything in the report, they can raise their concerns at Court rather than with the Centre. The Centre is not obliged to alter a report if asked to do so by a parent.
- Some centres are staffed entirely by volunteers and have limited opening hours – they may take longer to respond than a parent would like.
- Where the complaint is against a staff member, the Centre's investigation will need to be confidential to that member of staff and parents will not be made aware if any action has been taken against them as this is an HR matter.

If any of the above apply to the concern, please bear in mind before starting the complaints process that it is unlikely that the Centre will be able to resolve the complaint to your satisfaction.

- If a parent wishes to make a complaint, they will need to be clear about what they are hoping to get from the complaint and what they want the Centre to do to make things better.
- Where cases are in court, information relating to the case remains the property of the Court and should not therefore, be shared without the specific consent of the Court.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.



Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, First Steps Surrey Child Contact Centre wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

The Complaints Process

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Centre Manager / Coordinator, Kerri Rogers (unless they are about the Centre Manager / Coordinator. In this case Manager of Complaints, Elizabeth Lawlor will conduct the investigation). This should be done, in writing, preferably on the Complaint Form and emailed to: contact@surreycontactcentre.org.

The Manager / Coordinator will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 7 working days.

Within this response, the Manager will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Manager may consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Manager / Coordinator will provide a formal written response within 15 working days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If they are unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.



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The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions First Steps Surrey Child Contact Centre will take to resolve the complaint.

The Manager / Coordinator will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to Manager of Complaints, Elizabeth Lawlor in writing, outlining the basis of the complaint and the reasons for remaining unhappy with the process, within 10 working days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

This person will be impartial and will not have been involved in stage 1 of the complaint. If stage 1 was dealt with by the Manager of Complaints, Elizabeth Lawlor, a nominated person will be allocated and the complainant will be advised of their name and contact information.

Manager of Complaints or other nominated person will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 7 working days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply. The Manager of Complaints or other nominated person will consider the complaint and can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, they will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint.
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the centre's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Manager of Complaints or other nominated person will provide the complainant with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 15 working days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact NACCC if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by First Steps Surrey Child Contact Centre.



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The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions **First Steps Surrey Child Contact Centre** take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Next Steps - NACCC Involvement

If the complainant believes the Centre did not handle their complaint in accordance with the complaints procedure, they can contact NACCC after they have completed Stage 2.

NACCC will not reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by First Steps Surrey Child Contact Centre. They will consider whether First Steps Surrey Child Contact Centre has adhered to the procedure.

Alternatively, the complainant might choose to complain to the organisation that made the referral to that service (Cafcass or Children's Services). They may also wish to seek legal advice.

If the complainant decides to escalate their concern to NACCC and stages 1 and 2 are complete, they should complete the form available directly from NACCC and submit this to: contact@nacc.org.uk.

The form must only be submitted to NACCC after the enquiry has been fully exhausted and/or concluded by the centre and within a twelve-week timescale of the conclusion of stage 2.

NACCC's role in complaints handling

As a membership organisation NACCC has no responsibility for the staffing or day-to-day running of member centres; however, NACCC advises, supports, and accredits centres and requires member centres to work to the highest standards. Whilst centres are members of the NACCC Organisation, each centre is independently managed and run.

NACCC will not therefore, be able to investigate any complaint in detail, they will only look at whether the Centre has handled the complaint in line with their own complaints procedure. NACCC will not comment on the outcome of the complaint, conclusions will solely be based upon how well the procedure was followed.

If NACCC concludes that the Centre has not followed its own procedure, they may ask the Centre to look again at the way in which it has handled the complaint. This may not alter the Centre's decision. Only the Centre themselves can determine the substance of the complaint so it is always preferable to try to resolve issues direct with the Centre at an early stage.



NACCC Oversight

Once the form has been received, if it demonstrates that the process outlined at stages 1 and 2 has not been followed, the form will be returned to its author and they will be advised to follow the centre's complaints procedure.

Please do not send confidential information to NACCC, this will not be considered as part of the complaints process. Any information of this type received will not be filed and will be deleted or destroyed.

Once the form has reached the Complaints Officer at NACCC, 10 working days are allocated for the information on the form to be reviewed. During this time the complainant and the centre may or may not be contacted dependent upon the nature of the information shared.

On or prior to the 10th working day, the Complaints Officer will send a response to the complainant and the Contact Centre.

Should the complainant remain unhappy with the resolution offered by the Complaints Officer this can be escalated to the CEO in writing using the above email address. The CEO will respond within 10 working days of receipt. Their remit is only to consider if the Centre followed its procedure correctly. They cannot investigate your complaint in detail. The decision of the CEO/Trustees is final.

Variations to the complaints procedure

The **Manager of Complaints** may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest or to ensure an independent investigation, for example.

Monitoring and learning

Complaints will be recorded and are reviewed annually to identify any trends or need for further action to improve the service.

Written records of all complaints will be held by the **Manager/Coordinator** in a confidential file.

Policy approved by: Kerri Rogers Role: Manager/Co-ordinator Date: 13th September 2023

Signature:



Complaints Form

Please complete all sections of this form and return it to contact@surreycontactcentre.org

By completing this form, you acknowledge that other people might need to be informed about your complaint for the purposes of accessing additional information or ensuring the children's welfare. These parties might include the Contact Centre, any professionals working with your family. Depending upon the nature of your complaint we might also need to make other parties with Parental Responsibility aware.

The Person Wishing to Complain

Your name	
Address	
Phone number	
Email address	

Please indicate below (with a tick) the nature of your involvement with this centre

Child	Resident Parent	Non-Resident Parent	Other Family Member (Please specify)	Other (Please specify)

Please use the space below to tell us about your complaint. Please use as much detail as possible including any names if known

Please describe what you would like to see us do / what you think might rectify the issue



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Please use the space below to provide your Name and the date you completed this form

Name	Date of Completion

Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By who:
Complaint referred to:
Date:



Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the centre in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing an open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough investigation to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and other people relevant to the complaint if necessary
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant as appropriate, to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct investigations with an open mind
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any further complaint
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a response that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.