

Complaints policy for children and young people

Overview

Our ambition at Cafcass is for all children to have an exceptional experience at every stage of our work with them and wherever they are living. If we do not achieve this, and a child wants and needs to make a complaint to us or let us know what we could have done better, everyone at Cafcass will welcome that feedback and take it seriously so we can put things right wherever possible and improve our approach.

This policy sets out how we will respond to complaints from children. A complaint is any concern from a child that we need to respond to outside of our role in their family court proceedings. A website page for children, including a factsheet, supports this policy.¹ We also have a feedback form for children who want to tell us about their experience without necessarily needing a response, or who don't want to make a complaint.²

Our aims are to:

- Support children to make complaints by providing a complaints process and response that is kind, simple to understand, is empathetic and meets the needs of each individual child.
- Provide children and their families with information to help them understand what the complaints process can and cannot do, within family court proceedings.
- Promote a positive learning culture where complaints are welcomed as a way of making improvements to the way we work with children.
- Uphold the values in our practice framework, Together with children and families, which are:
 - always looking for strengths and risks
 - believing in respectful relationships
 - clear and reasoned decision making
 - holding children and families at the heart of our work
 - wanting to know more about children and families and what is important to them.

Why this is important for children

It is important that we work together with children to understand how they experience our service because it is a service like no other. We work with children when very serious decisions are being made by the family court about the current and future arrangements for their lives. Our work is so important to them, and we need to know when it goes well and when it doesn't go well so that we can put things right for them if we need to, and make improvements for the future. Our approach is intended to remove barriers to children sharing concerns with us, and to show them what we have learnt and changed as a result of their complaint.

¹ <http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/children-and-young-people/get-touch-give-feedback-or-complain/i-want-give-feedback-or-make-complaint>

² <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/17232/> available [here](#).

Our policy

1. We have a Complaints and Correspondence team independent of our frontline social work teams. This team has a dedicated manager for children's complaints.
2. Children can raise complaints with us at any time, even after our work with them and their family has ended. Complaints can be made in person, by phone, letter, email or via our website 'contact us' form.³
3. The Complaints Manager needs to be satisfied that the child has sufficient understanding to make the complaint, and that it is their complaint. These assessments will be made for each individual child and their unique circumstances. This may include speaking with relevant Cafcass colleagues or with the child's parent or carer.
4. Children can ask someone they trust to raise a complaint on their behalf. We will ask if we can speak with the child where possible and will direct our response to them. This is an important part of our complaints process so that we can establish a trusting relationship with them and hear directly from them if we can, to help them explain what hasn't gone well. We will never insist on speaking with a child if they do not want this to happen.
5. If at any time we see that a representative is not acting in the best interests of the child, we will stop our consideration of the complaint. If we do this, we will share our reasons in writing and signpost the representative to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman so that they can discuss further with them if they are unhappy with our decision.
6. For complaints received in writing, whether by email, letter or a website form we will acknowledge the complaint within one working day.
7. Once we have acknowledged the complaint, we will work to a clear timetable agreed with the child. The children's complaints manager, or another complaints manager in their absence, will contact the child to introduce themselves as soon as possible and certainly within three working days. They will offer to talk with the child about their complaint, using the child's preferred method of communication. Children can choose whether they want to meet with us in person or would prefer to do this by video, phone, or by email.
8. The manager will usually need speak to the Cafcass officer and their manager as part of their investigation, to help them to understand the work that has been done with the child and whether there is any learning to be identified.
9. The manager will send a written response to the child's complaint and will also think about using storyboards to communicate what they have done and the decision they have made where this is appropriate. They will aim to do this within 10 working days,

³ <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/contact-us/> available [here](#).

or within a timeframe agreed with the child. Where we exceed 10 working days, we will keep in touch with the child so that they know what we are doing and when they can expect to hear about their complaint. We regularly report to our corporate management team on whether we are keeping to our promised timescales and what we are learning from children's complaints.

10. The written response will be shared with the child's parent or carer unless it is assessed that to do so could create a risk to the child or family. The decision of whether or not to share the report will reflect the circumstances for each child and may follow a conversation with the child.
11. In the written response to the complaint, and in any follow-up correspondence if needed, the complaints manager will explain whether they found things that we need to put right for the child. They will also share any learning they have identified so that the child can understand how their complaint has made a difference and what Cafcass will be doing differently.
12. The ways we can put things right for the child might include:
 - An acknowledgement, explanation or meaningful apology for the error
 - Recognising the impact of any errors, which may include compensation
 - Amending Cafcass records or clarifying factual errors with court if the complaint is about live court proceedings
 - Changing policies or practices to prevent the same mistake(s) happening again
13. The complaints manager will share the complaint and any learning or reflections from it, with the person the complaint was about (if relevant) and the senior Cafcass managers responsible for that person and any other parts of Cafcass that need to make changes as a result of the learning. This may include the option for a senior leader to meet with the child, as part of the complaint resolution, to hear from the child directly, with a parent, carer or other adult who the child trusts to support them.
14. At the end of the complaint investigation, we will explain to the child that they have the option to have a 'listen and learn' conversation with Cafcass when the court proceedings have ended, to share any further experiences or reflections.
15. If a child is not happy with how their complaint has been responded to they can contact the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, via an MP.⁴ They can do this directly or ask someone they trust to raise this with the Ombudsman on their behalf. The Ombudsman makes final decisions on complaints that have not been resolved by Cafcass and their service is free for everyone.
16. We will seek feedback from children on their experience of the complaints process, to check if they are happy with how we have resolved things for them and to help us better manage future complaints.

⁴ www.ombudsman.org.uk or call 0345 015 4033

17. Our senior leaders take an active interest and involvement in all sources of feedback and complaints. Our senior leadership team and Board receive regular reports on the performance of our complaints service including the main themes identified in complaints, learning identified, and what has happened as a result. An annual summary of this learning is published in our Annual Report and Accounts.

Policy owner	Hema Johal, Children's Complaints Manager
Approved by	Corporate Management Team, May 2024
Equality impact analysis	July 2023
Implemented	17 June 2024
Version	1.0 – first standalone children's policy document
Amended	NA
Next review	June 2025

How we respond to a child's complaint

Within 10 working days unless an alternative is agreed with the child.

A child's complaint is shared with Cafcass



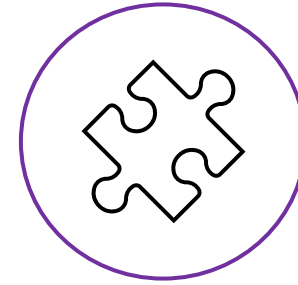
① Raising a complaint

Complaints can be made at any time in person, by phone, letter, email, or via our website. Children can ask someone they trust to raise a complaint on their behalf.



② Assessing the complaint

The Children's Complaints Manager will assess the complaint and determine the next steps, tailored to the individual child and their unique circumstances.



③ Contacting the child or parent

The Children's Complaints Manager will contact the child to introduce themselves and arrange how to communicate about the complaint, either in person, by video, phone, or email

We have listened to the child (or their representative) and assessed what next steps would be in their best interests



④ The investigation

The Children's Complaints Manager will speak to the Cafcass officer and their manager to understand the work that has been done, and what could have been done differently.



⑤ Sharing the findings

A written response will be shared within 10 working days of the complaint being made, or within a timeframe agreed with the child. This will include any learning identified, and anything we need to do to put things right. It will be shared with the child's parent or carer unless to do so would create a risk.



⑥ Sharing the learning

Learning is shared with relevant staff and we regularly report to our Chief Executive and senior leadership team on children's complaints. Options for learning may include offering a "listen and learn" conversation with the child or family when the proceedings have ended.

Our investigation of the complaint has ended, with opportunities to give feedback