



Complaints Policy

At Soul Soup the well-being of every young person is at the core of our service and we strive to treat everyone who accesses our organisation with consideration and respect. Our aim is to provide consistent high standards of professionalism across our counselling provision and associated activities at all times and practice within The Ethical Framework and Code of Practice set out by the professional body for Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland, COSCA.

However, we do recognise that there may be occasions when our service falls below a client's expectations, leading to a complaint against Soul Soup or an individual(s) working for us. Complaints will be accepted by clients, third parties or representatives. We aim to treat every concern received seriously and will investigate all matters as a priority.

The following procedure outlines the steps we will take to resolve any complaints against us. While it is helpful to us to know who you are so we can get in touch with you for extra details, we believe everyone has a right to complain.

A copy of this procedure can be found on our website www.soulsoup.co.uk or on request by telephone 01387 266667.



Confidentiality:

1. All aspects of any complaint will be dealt with in a confidential manner.
2. All parties relating to the complaint will be given the name and contact details of the person, normally the Services Manager, investigating the complaint.
3. The Services Manager will discuss the details of the complaint only with the Board of Management, the complainant and the individual(s) to whom the complaint is against, and the counselling supervisor. The Services Manager will only divulge information that is necessary for the purposes of investigation.
4. All files and administration will be kept in a secure location such as a lockable filing system or password protected digital file, with access to both areas restricted and accessed only by an authorised person(s).
5. All information stored will be used solely for the purposes of investigating the complaint and for any subsequent disciplinary matters and will be documented in a professional and appropriate manner.
6. All meetings relating to the complaint will be conducted in a private area to ensure that details of the complaint and privacy of the parties involved is maintained.

Please Note: Complaints can only be dealt with if received within three years of the incident.

Who can complain?

- Anyone who is using the counselling service
- Anyone who has used the counselling service within the past three years
- Anyone who has enquired about the counselling service or is on the waiting list
- Anyone from another organisation who has enquired about our service, or who is working with or representing someone who is using or has used the service
- Anonymous complaints will be investigated by the Services Manager or the Chair of the Board, who will use discretion in assessing what action should be taken.



How to Make a Complaint?

If you are receiving our counselling services, please try to talk your concerns over with your counsellor if you can. A formal complaint should be made in the first instance to our Chair of the Board, or our Services Manager. This can be in person by appointment, by telephone, or in writing by email or letter.

Please contact: Chair of the Board/Services Manager Soul Soup 109 Irish St Dumfries DG1 2NP.
email: complaints@soulsoup.co.uk.

If you have any difficulty making a complaint in person or in writing, please let us know and we will try to help you.

Scope of Complaints

Complaints made under this Procedure may cover paid staff, volunteer counsellors, Board members, and other volunteers or contractors acting for or on behalf of the Soul Soup Counselling Service.

Malicious and vexatious complaints

Soul Soup acknowledges that most complaints are raised because of genuine concerns. However, parties who make malicious and vexatious allegations may be subject to further action depending on the circumstances.

Options for Action

The following options may be suitable, taking the complainant's behaviour and circumstances into account:

- Limiting the complainant to one medium of contact (telephone, letter, email etc).
- Requiring the complainant to communicate only with one named member of staff or independent mediator.
- Requiring any personal contacts to take place in the presence of a witness and in a suitable location.
- Refusing to register and process further complaints about the same matter



Managing Complainant Contacts

Having designated a complaint as malicious and/or vexatious and decided on appropriate option/s for action (eg: restricted access), Soul Soup will send the complainant a formal letter, which will include a copy of the policy and will explain that this represents the full and final decision in respect of the raised complaint why the decision has been taken what it means for their contact with the organisation

Where a full and final decision on the complaint has been reached and communicated, the complainant will be told that future correspondence will be read and placed on file, but not acknowledged unless it contains material new information.

A designated officer will be identified who will read future correspondence to pick up any significant new information.

Confidentiality and Communications

Every complaint will be treated with care and confidentiality. We will attempt to communicate clearly and directly with all complainants or their representatives in a timely manner, as described below.

Safety of Clients

If a complaint relates to the conduct of a counsellor in counselling, at all times the client's safety will be a primary consideration. Suspension of counselling and/or disciplinary proceedings may take place at any stage of the complaints process, if appropriate.

Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

Every opportunity will be taken at the time of the initial complaint to settle the concern informally. This may include telephone conversations and/or face to face meetings or written explanation of the reasons for a decision taken. The Services Manager will normally handle the complaint at this stage, but if the Services Manager is the subject of the complaint, then the Chair of the Board of Trustees or other designated member of the Board will undertake to respond to the complaint and manage the complaints procedure. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of discussions at this stage, then a formal written complaint can be made.



Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

A formal complaint will be acknowledged in writing by the Services Manager within seven days. A copy of the Complaints Procedure will be enclosed. If an employee, volunteer or contractor of Soul Soup Counselling Service is the subject of the complaint, they will be sent a copy of the complaint along with the Complaints Procedure.

Investigation of the Complaint

The Services Manager will investigate the formal complaint. If the person complained against is the Services Manager, a Board member would investigate and vice versa. If the complaint was against both the Services Manager or a Board member, then an independent and impartial person who has relevant experience will be appointed by the Board of Trustees to investigate. This person will be independent of the Soul Soup Counselling Service and the complainant, and all parties involved will be given the opportunity to declare a conflict of interest with the relevant internal or external investigator.

Whoever the investigator is they will make a thorough and confidential investigation of the complaint, contacting both the complainant and the person complained against. The investigator will have access to relevant documents and policy papers within the Soul Soup Counselling Service and to staff members, if appropriate. They may ask for evidence from either party and if this is sought in person, they will meet with each party separately.

All parties will have the right to be accompanied, and/or be represented, by a supportive person of their choice. The complainant and the party or parties complained against and/or their representative will not be asked to attend any meetings together.

The investigator will make a written response to the complainant within twenty-eight days, a copy of which will be sent to Soul Soup Counselling Service and the person complained against. If it proves not possible to respond within 28 days, the complainant will be informed of any reasons for a delay. All investigations will be completed and responded to within a maximum of six months.

The investigator will make recommendations regarding the action required to bring about the resolution of the complaint and any sanctions which he/she may consider appropriate to apply to either party. In such circumstances, he/she will also provide instructions for the monitoring of the fulfilment of said actions or sanctions. Sanctions may be but not limited to include verbal or written apology, retraining and be monitored by the Services Manager.



The Services Manager or Chair of the Board, whoever is managing the complaint, may halt the procedure at any stage if it emerges that legal action is under way, pending or intended, until such time as any legal process is complete.

Stage 3 – Appeal

The Grounds for an Appeal

A complainant may appeal against the findings of the investigator on the following grounds:

- that the complaints procedure had not been followed
- that there was new evidence which the investigator did not have access to in the investigation

An appeal cannot be accepted only on the grounds that the complainant disagrees with the investigator's report.

Making an Appeal

The complainant must make an appeal in writing within fourteen days of the receipt of the investigator's report. The reasons for the appeal must be clearly set out in writing. The appeal will be acknowledged in writing by the Services Manager and considered by Soul Soup Board of Trustees.

The complainant will be informed in writing within twenty-one days whether or not the appeal is accepted.

The Appeal Panel

If an appeal is accepted, the Managing Director will arrange to set up an Appeals Panel. The panel will be made up of three members: the Chair of the Board of Trustees or other designated member of the Board; and two persons from outside of Soul Soup Counselling Service with relevant experience.

The panel will meet within twenty-eight days of the notification of the acceptance of the appeal to the complainant. No-one on the panel will have taken any part in the previous handling of the complaint.



The Appeal Hearing

Fourteen days written notice of the date of the hearing and the composition of the panel will be given to all parties. All documentation relating to the appeal will be copied to all parties and the panel members fourteen days before the hearing. The complainant and the complained against may be asked to make a written statement to the panel which will be circulated seven days before the hearing. The complainant and complained against may be required to attend the hearing and may be accompanied, and/or be represented, by a supportive person of their choice. The complainant and complained against will have the opportunity to make a short statement to the hearing.

The investigator and the Services Manager or the Chair of the Board (whoever managed the original complaint) will be available to give information to the panel. The appeal hearing will be recorded. The appeal panel will have the authority to adjourn the hearing. The panel will come to a decision regarding the appeal in private session. This discussion will not be recorded but a written record will be made of the proceedings. The decision will be given in writing within seven days. If the appeal is upheld the panel will make recommendations regarding the action required to bring about the resolution of the complaint. Soul Soup Counselling Service will abide by the decision and recommendations of the appeal panel.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the decision of the appeals panel or remains dissatisfied about the content of the investigator's report, he/she will be advised to contact COSCA.

Monitoring of Complaints

A record will be kept of all complaints received. Anonymous complaints will also be recorded, including the reasons for any decision to pursue or not to pursue the complaint. Complaints will be monitored regularly by the Director and brought to the attention of the Board of Trustees. Once a complaint has been concluded, an 'Outcome Report to COSCA at the Conclusion of Complaints Proceedings' will be submitted to COSCA within one month. Records of complaints will be kept for a period of five years.

Complaints to COSCA

COSCA is the professional body for counselling and psychotherapy in Scotland. Soul Soup Counselling Service are therefore also covered by the COSCA Complaints Procedure. If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the decision of the appeals panel or remains dissatisfied



about the content of the investigator's report, he/she will be advised that they can submit a complaint to COSCA under their Complaints Procedure.

COSCA
16 Melville Terrace
Stirling
FK8 2NE
01786 475140
info@cosca.org.uk
www.cosca.org.uk

Any parties wishing to declare a conflict of interest during an external part of the complaints process must address them as soon as possible to the external adjudicator, Third Sector, Dumfries and Galloway.

We can supply this procedure in different formats and languages. If you have difficulty, please contact us.

[Advice services](#)

Citizens advice Service Dumfries

81-85 Irish Street
Dumfries
DG1 2PQ
Phone: 0300 303 4321

Dumfries Advocacy service

107 English Street
Dumfries
DG1 2DA
Phone: 01387 247237

COSCA Counselling and psychotherapy in Scotland

16 Melville Terrace
Stirling
FK8 2NE
Phone: 01786 475140