



Policy Title: Complaints Management Policy

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Ver.	Amendment Description / Review information	Created / Rev / Modified By	Date	Approved by Board / CEO	Review Date
1.0	New Policy Document	T Dignan	Aug 2018		
1.01	Annual Review	T Dignan	Sept 2019		
1.01	Annual Review	T Dignan	July 2020	Sept 2020	2021

Policy Statement

EPIC is a national organisation that works with and for children and young people who are currently living in care or who have experience of living in care. This includes those in residential care, foster care, relative care, hostel, high support, and special care. EPIC also works with young people preparing to leave care and in aftercare, and with adults with care experience.

EPIC is the only independent organisation providing direct 1:1 advocacy support to children and young people in care; to enable them to have their views and concerns heard, to empower them to speak for themselves, to resolve the issues and problems they raise, to help them get the services and resources they need and bring about positive change in their lives.

EPIC's National Advocacy Service is a national 1:1 advocacy service for young people in care. Through this Advocacy Service, EPIC resolves issues children and young people raise in relation to their care or in relation to care in general. As part of the Advocacy Service, EPIC delivers a visiting advocacy service to high support units, special care units, children detention schools and other identified residential services to facilitate access to the advocacy service by particularly vulnerable children and young people in care.

It is the policy of EPIC to respond to all complaints in a prompt, fair and sensitive manner. We genuinely want to know if anybody is unhappy with any aspect of our service or wish EPIC to assist them in making a complaint unrelated to EPIC. The Complaints policy is not designed to apportion blame, but to learn, respond and improve our services. This policy relates specifically to the Fundraising Policies and Practices of the National Office.

Purpose of this policy

The purpose of the EPIC Complaints Policy and Procedure is to offer a mechanism for those who wish to make a complaint against EPIC, the services provided by EPIC, an EPIC employee or volunteer

or those who have donated to us or supported us and to ensure that all complaints are considered and responded to promptly, fairly and sensitively. The aim of the Complaints policy and procedure is to try to resolve complaints quickly and fairly. Complaints provide us with an opportunity to learn, adapt and improve our services.

Scope of this policy

This policy applies to all volunteers and employees of EPIC and those children and young people with whom EPIC works. It is for use by any member of the public who uses, has used, or has sought to use any EPIC's services or support or has received or sought assistance from EPIC. It is also for use by individuals, private and statutory organisations, foundations, or corporations that work with, have worked with, or have sought to work with EPIC in any capacity. Complaints are viewed by EPIC as a constructive part of the organisation's learning process and accountability for service provision.

What a complainant can expect from a complaints policy and procedure

- a fair hearing, a timely response, and a clear explanation of the outcome even whether or not found in their favour
- an appropriate remedy where it is found that they were treated unfairly or improperly and
- an assurance that all complaints will inform policy and practice within EPIC

Guiding Principles

- Those who wish to make a complaint should find it easy to do so
- Complaints will be taken seriously and be dealt with promptly, fairly, and sensitively
- Complaints will be dealt with informally in the first instance by talking to the individual/service involved
- If a complainant is not satisfied with how a complaint is dealt with at the informal level, they have a right to then make a formal complaint in writing
- EPIC will be open and accountable for any decisions made in response to a complaint
- EPIC will act consistently, fairly, and proportionately in response to every complaint
- EPIC will acknowledge mistakes where they occur and offer a sincere apology when this occurs
- EPIC will use any lessons learnt from complaints to improve and change our work when necessary

Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection

Complaints which relate to or identify a risk to the safety or welfare of a child or young person, will be dealt with under EPIC's Child and Youth Protection Policy¹.

¹ [Governance | EPIC \(epiconline.ie\)](https://www.epiconline.ie)

Complaints against volunteers working with EPIC

If a complaint is made in relation to unprofessional or inappropriate behaviour by a volunteer (e.g. Board member, intern etc.) it will be investigated in accordance with EPIC's complaints policy.

Complaints against Staff members

If a complaint is made in relation to unprofessional or inappropriate behaviour by a staff member the relevant employee policy and procedure will be implemented.

Confidentiality

All complaints will be treated as confidential and information will only be shared with others on a 'need to know' basis. Information on other services or services users, including assistance provided to others, will not be shared with the person making the complaint.

Complaints Procedure

All EPIC staff will be mindful of the rights of those whom we assist to complain and to be heard appropriately. All complaints are dealt with in strict confidence.

Anonymous Complaints

In the interests of fairness and transparency, EPIC will not respond to anonymous complaints.

Complaints Management Process

Making a Complaint:

All complaints made by individuals or organisations will be taken very seriously, heard in a fair and courteous manner, and dealt with sensitively and respectfully. Complaints can be made orally or in writing. A complaint may be made directly to the person who is the subject of the complaint, another member of staff or, if preferred, a member of the senior management team e.g. National Advocacy Manager/CEO or to Board Chair. It would be EPIC's hope that, as far as possible, complaints would be satisfactorily dealt with at the informal stage.

If the complaint cannot be solved informally, the complainant will be offered the opportunity to have the complaint heard at a formal level.

Informal Complaints Process:

The purpose of the informal complaint process is to encourage any individual or organisation who wishes to make attempt to resolve the complaint informally by speak directly with the individual who is the subject of the complaint, another staff member or the manager of the service involved and to attempt resolve the complaint informally. It is hoped that most issues would be resolved at this stage.

Stages in the informal complaints process

1. Where an individual or organisation makes an informal complaint in person, by phone, or email, relevant details must be taken and recorded by the person contacted in the first instance – even if that person is the subject of the complaint. Where possible an explanation, further information and / or an apology will be offered to resolve the complaint at this point.

2. If the complaint cannot be resolved at this point, contact details for the individual will be recorded and arrangements will be made to contact them with an initial response at a time convenient to them.

3. If the complaint relates to a volunteer, staff member or service other than the person contacted, the person taking the complaint will offer to pass on the complaint and ask the person if they wish to be contacted by the relevant party directly. If they agree, their contact details will be passed on to the relevant individual.

4. If the complainant does not wish to be contacted directly by the person against whom they have made the complaint, this will be noted and a record of their complaint will be passed to the relevant member of senior management team or if appropriate, Board Chair. This person will then contact the complainant by phone or meet in person, if preferable, to hear their complaint.

5. Where possible an explanation, further information and / or an apology will be offered to resolve the complaint at this time. If the complaint is resolved satisfactorily at this point, no further action is required.

Stages in the formal complaints process:

Where an individual or organisation wishes to make a formal complaint (whether or not they have gone through the informal complaints process) they will be asked to do so in writing. The individual making the complaint will be given a **Complaints Policy Leaflet and a Complaints Form** and asked to put their complaint in writing. EPIC will provide any assistance required to complete the form. The following information should be provided on the form.

- The name and address of person affected and the EPIC service they are involved with
- If the complaint is being made by a third party, such as parent, guardian, or other adult on behalf of the complainant, the name and address of the third party will also be recorded.
- The nature of the complaint and required details including names, dates and specific actions will be recorded.
- As much detail of the complaint as possible will be recorded. Every effort will be made to include all relevant documentation/correspondence
- In the event that the complainant has special needs that may affect their ability to make a complaint every effort will be made to assist in whatever way is required e.g. assistance with reading and writing etc -this will be provided by an independent party if requested.

Responding to a Formal Complaint

On receipt of a formal written complaint, the person the complaint is addressed to will **acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days**. Every effort will then be made to try to resolve the issue immediately. This may be by way of providing:

- An acknowledgement and/or
- An explanation and/or
- Additional information and/or
- An apology

If this is not sufficient, the individual dealing with the complaint (e.g. senior manager) will contact the person making the complaint and, if agreeable, arrange to speak to or meet the complainant within the following 10 working days.

If, for any reason, it is not possible or appropriate for the person dealing with the complaint to continue to deal with the complaint at this point (for example if the complainant is unhappy with the way in which they are interacting with the complainant) the complaint will be passed to the next appropriate person e.g. Senior manager, CEO, Board Chair etc.

- The complainant has the right to be accompanied to any meeting in relation to the complaint.
- Minutes of each meeting will be taken and kept securely.
- If resolution can be made by issuing an apology, it will be done so at such a meeting and followed up in writing in 5 working days.
- However, should further assessment be required this will be outlined to the complainant.
- A record of all meetings and discussions in relation to any complaint will be retained on file.
- All complaints will be treated as confidential
- Where necessary the person dealing with the complaint on EPIC's behalf, may seek best advice from a senior manager or, if deemed necessary, a legal professional.
- Having completed an assessment, the person dealing with the complaint will write to the person, outlining the outcome of the assessment. This should take place within 30 days of receiving the complaint. If the assessment cannot be completed within 30 days, the person will be updated on progress and given a reasonable timeframe for the conclusion of the assessment. The person will be updated on progress at least every 20 days thereafter, until the process is complete.
- When the assessment is concluded, the person tasked with dealing with the complaint will decide whether or not the complaint should be upheld.
- This person will then write to the complainant outlining the reason for the decision and offering to meet with them in person to explain this if desired.

Appealing the Outcome of a Complaint

- If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they may lodge an appeal. Details of who the appeal can be made to will be given to the complainant at that time. Any appeal should then be lodged within 10 working days of receiving an initial outcome to the complaint made.
- Should the complainant choose to appeal they will be facilitated to do so.
- An appeal should be made to the CEO (unless the CEO is the subject of the complaint in which case it should be made to the Chairperson of the Board of Management).
- An assessment of any appeal will be completed within 30 days.
- It is the responsibility of the person handling the complaint assessment:
 1. to maintain all records confidentially,
 2. to issue an apology, explanation, or acknowledgement to the complainant as appropriate

3. to consider and implement any changes in practice that may be required as a result of the outcome of the complaint

4. to submit a summary of the complaint and how it has been resolved to the Board of Management and any other stakeholders as appropriate

Right of Reply

- The subject of any complaint has a right to know that a complaint has been made against them and a right of reply
- Any response made by the subject of a complaint will be noted and included with the record of the complaint
- It should be acknowledged that complaints can be a source of distress, upset or embarrassment. Independent support may be offered to the subject of a complaint if this is requested or deemed necessary

Follow up on complaints received

- A record of the complaint and the response will be maintained in a confidential file.
- Complaints will be reviewed to identify areas for improvement, training needs, resource implications or policy amendments required.

False or Malicious Complaints

All complaints will be considered based on verifiable facts and data. No assumption will be made regarding a complaint or complainant and every complaint will be addressed in a consistent manner.

Where it is established that a complaint was either false or unfounded this will be clearly noted on the file and both the complainant and the person/s or service against whom the complaint was made will be advised in writing.