

# Listen, support, respond: tips for handling complaints and concerns

Complaints and concerns are a valuable source of feedback that can help your practice improve its service. Handling them well not only shows patients that you are listening and that their concerns matter, but it can also help to improve your reputation.

**We've put together  
10 tips to help  
you improve the  
way your practice  
handles complaints.**



1

## 'You said, we did'

Showing that you have listened to feedback, concerns and complaints from patients and made changes as a result, will give them confidence in your practice. You could place a suggestion box in your reception area, create a feedback form on your website or put up a 'you said, we did' notice board to show how you have responded to concerns and complaints.

2

## Empower your colleagues

Supporting colleagues to invite feedback and respond to concerns and complaints in good time will help your practice make improvements in this area. Invest in training or create a space for colleagues to share experiences and learning from complaints.

**3**

## Make the most of your Patient Participation Group (PPG):

They can:

- review your practice complaints policy before publication to make sure that it is clear, understandable, accessible for patients and written in an appropriate tone.
- collect feedback from patients about your practice
- work with your practice to review your comments box and Friends and Family Test data.

**4**

## Be responsive

Show your patients how your practice has taken steps to stop the same mistakes happening again. Be open and share ideas about what can be done to improve your service.

**5**

## Explain why and how decisions are made

Using established good practice and NICE guidance to clearly explain your decisions about care and treatment helps individuals understand what happened and why.

**6**

## Say 'sorry' and mean it

A genuine apology can sometimes make all the difference and stop an issue from turning into a formal complaint. Avoid using 'sorry if' and 'sorry but'.

**7**

## Be supportive and signpost to help

Advocacy services and local Healthwatch groups can make the complaints process less stressful for the patient and practice staff.

**8**

## Make use of resources

Use NHS England's *Assurance of Good Complaint Handling for Primary Care Toolkit* to help you prepare for meetings, create an environment where people feel able to share and reach solutions with you.

**9**

## Be joined up

You may receive a complaint that involves more than one organisation or realise another organisation or professional is involved during your investigation. There is a requirement for organisations to co-operate on joint complaints. Together, you should agree who will lead on a response and let the complainant know which organisation will be responding to their concerns.

**10**

## Be fair

If you need to remove an individual from your patient list, stick to guidance on carrying this out. An individual should not be removed from a patient list solely because a complaint has been made. If there has been a serious incident and it's necessary to remove a patient from your list, then make sure this is done at the time of the incident.