

Guidance for people who wish to make a complaint

If you wish to make a complaint against one of our registrants or counselling organisations, the following can help you understand the process.

ACC takes any enquiry about making a complaint seriously and provides this guidance to help make the complaints process understandable and accessible to clients who believe they have a grievance or a concern. All complaints will be treated fairly and impartially.

1. If you believe there is an issue to address, we would encourage you, in the first place, to seek local resolution with the counsellor or their agency through the complaints procedure mentioned at the start of counselling.
2. If you have attempted this and feel the issue is not resolved satisfactorily, you may wish to contact ACC by phoning/writing/emailing and asking for the appropriate form or simply by downloading it from our website [here](#). If you wish to discuss the matter with someone before submitting the form, please contact ACC by email to complaints@acc-uk.org).
3. You will need to make clear what you believe the counsellor or counselling organisation did or failed to do in relation to our ACC Ethics and Practice [here](#). We recognise that any complaints process can be daunting and sometimes distressing, therefore, ACC will offer someone to impartially help you understand which areas you believe were breached. This does not mean the person agrees with your complaint, but they will provide support to minimise the difficulty of filling in the form appropriately.
4. It is important to note that ACC will not provide legal advice or pay any expenses in respect of travel or other expenses incurred, either by the complainant or the person complained against.
5. When your complaint is formally received, it will be referred to the Chair of ACC who will make a decision about how to proceed. The Register Advisory Panel (RAP) is an independent panel of lay representatives that advise ACC on ethical and professional conduct matters and their Chair is consulted in these matters. They may decide that the complaint cannot be processed and you will be informed of the reasons. If they agree to process the complaint the following will happen:

- A. The Chair of ACC will write to acknowledge receipt of your complaint, normally within 7 working days. The process of investigation will then begin.
- B. The Chair of ACC will write to the person against whom the complaint was made, normally within 14 working days. This letter will explain what the complaint is about and include the relevant sections from your complaint form (excluding any personal contact details).
- C. ACC will appoint an investigator and you will be notified who this is and an approximate time period in which to expect contact from the investigator.
- You will need to provide information for the investigator. These documents will vary according to the individual complaint but the investigator will be in touch to ask you some questions and sometimes to ask for supporting evidence.
- ACC will act as quickly as they can, but sometimes there are things that delay the process. We will seek to keep you informed.
- You will be expected to work with the investigator and respond to the questions and supply any documents asked for.
- The ACC investigator will close the first part of the process by writing a report of the findings, making a recommendation whether or not there is a prima face case to answer.
- D. The investigator's report will be presented to a Pre-hearing Assessment Panel and a decision will be taken whether a disciplinary panel is necessary. Either way, you will receive notification of the outcome of the investigation. In this case you will have opportunity to appeal this decision by providing further information or giving acceptable grounds for a disciplinary hearing not to take place. If that is not provided satisfactorily the appeal will then be closed and the Disciplinary Panel will proceed.
- E. If required, the Disciplinary Panel will convene and all parties will be called to attend if they wish and all evidence so far gained will usually be made available to both parties. The panel will come to a conclusion and subsequently make its decision known to both parties. There is a right to appeal.
- F. If the complaint is upheld, ACC will implement sanctions in accordance with the recommendations of the Disciplinary Panel and/or Register Advisory

Panel. The ACC Member/Registrant will need to comply with the sanctions specified.

- G. There are occasions when the complaint is not upheld but recommendations about practice are still made to enhance the safety of both counselees/complainants and the safe practice of the counsellor for the future. The learning points, gained through the process, may then inform best practice that can be disseminated to all counsellors and agencies without reference to the original complaint (i.e. anonymously).

Document History

1.0	First Published	January 2015
1.1	Amendments to bring guidelines up to date	October 2022