



Association for Family &
Systemic Psychotherapy

Compliments, Concerns or Complaints Policy

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www.theafsp.org

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Introduction

The Association for Family and Systemic Psychotherapy (AFSP) is the leading professional association for family and systemic psychotherapists in the UK. We develop and grow our professional community, champion their work, and make sure that the ideas of family and systemic psychotherapy have a greater influence and positive impact on all our lives.

To do this we accredit family and systemic training courses, run by external training providers. We support AFSP members who are qualified therapists to apply for professional registration with the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) and we help them meet the requirements for continuous professional development through the provision of webinars, training and publications.

AFSP aims to provide a high quality, responsive service. We welcome feedback as a way of monitoring and improving what we do, and having this policy and a transparent way of resolving a concern or complaint is a way of doing this.

We are an organisational member of the CFCSP, College of Family, Couple and Systemic Psychotherapy. We are accountable to members through our AGM when Trustees are elected, accounts are approved, reports received and resolutions discussed. The UKCP through our 5-year Organisational Member Review, the Charity Commission, and Companies House with accounts audited each year.

There is a separate '**Raising a Concern or a Complaint Policy and Procedure**' if you want to report an issue about an individual AFSP member.

This policy is for anyone who receives a service and wants to report a compliment, concern or complaint about AFSP itself, any of its staff, or the people who work on behalf of AFSP. It covers all of our products and services including annual conference, webinars and Context magazine but does not apply to the Journal of Family Therapy. Please refer to the Complaints Procedure of our publishing partner Wiley.

If the staff member is also a registered member, we will manage it under this policy if it relates to their AFSP work, under the individual member policy (Complaints and Concerns Policy and Procedure) if it relates to their individual practice or conduct as a family therapist, and under the Grievance Policy if it is employment related.

We thought it would help you to provide definitions of what is meant by a compliment, concern or complaint.



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Compliment: a polite expression of approval, praise or admiration.

Concern: feeling worried, nervous or anxious about something, or something that makes you feel troubled about an issue or situation.

Complaint: something that is unsatisfactory or unacceptable.

Complimenting our Organisation

Compliments are appreciated, useful and important to us. Receiving these enables us to:

- Know that what we are providing is satisfactory to third parties.
- Gives staff recognition through positive feedback.
- Helps to shape our organisational development and provision.

We will acknowledge any compliments we receive and share them with the staff member or volunteer they relate to.

With your permission we may share them on our website, journal, and with the wider AFSP membership.

Raising a Concern or making a Complaint

This kind of feedback is also important to us so that we can learn, and although we do our best, there are times when we will get things wrong and/or make mistakes. This information will always be taken seriously and will be recorded and responded to in line with the procedure set out in this policy. Our aim is to support you through this process.

There is a time limit of 3 calendar months to raise a concern or make a complaint from the date the last issue or incident occurred.

Concerns and Complaints Procedure

Stage 1

We have found that concerns and most complaints can be resolved informally at this stage. We recognise that you might wish to ask for information about events and decisions at this point which may help to provide an informal resolution and understanding of what has happened. We would encourage you to speak directly to the person or persons involved in the first



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instance. If you don't feel able to do this, we are happy to find a suitable staff member to mediate. This will not be anyone directly involved with the concern or complaint.

We will always offer you an explanation of what has happened and be truthful. However, we may not be able to share personal information, data, or other confidential information. You may disagree with our decision, but we hope you will understand how it has been made.

If for any reason this does not resolve the issue or is not possible, and you want to make a formal complaint, you can go on to Stage 2.

AFSP staff members or the people who work on behalf of AFSP, or Context journal have individual rights if you are raising a concern or making a complaint about them. They will be given the opportunity to respond and to present any evidence that they may have to support them.

Stage 2

Our intention is to resolve complaints as quickly, fairly and effectively as possible. We are aware that it can be difficult to raise a concern or complaint and will deal with it sensitively.

To make a complaint, you need to put it in writing either via email or hard copy, including any supporting evidence you may have. Texts cannot be accepted. You may also ask for information that relates to your concern or complaint. If there is any reason that you would find this difficult you can contact AFSP for support, and we will endeavour to make reasonable adjustments. E.g. help with what to include.

Please mark it Private & Confidential, and send it to:

Operations and Finance Director
AFSP
Exec 6, 7 & 8
The Causeway
Wilderspool Causeway
Warrington
Cheshire
WA4 6PS

Or

Operational.director@theafsp.org



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After receipt of the complaint the Operations and Finance Director will conduct an initial assessment to consider whether there is a case to answer on the face of it. If the complaint is about the Operations and Finance Director, you can send your complaint to the Ethics Committee. It will then be discussed with and investigated by the most relevant person/department, depending on the subject matter of the complaint.

We will consider and investigate a complaint fairly and justly according to the evidence. Gathering and not concealing evidence.

2.1 Timescale

Your complaint will be acknowledged within three working days of receipt. Whenever possible and appropriate, we hope to provide a full resolution to your complaint at the same time.

If the contents of your complaint means that we need to undertake further investigation, upon acknowledgment of receipt we will provide you with an expected timescale for our response and keep you updated. We will also inform you who is managing your complaint so that you can discuss the conduct of the process with them. If you are concerned that the process may not be impartial you should raise this.

You will be updated about the status of your complaint no later than 28 days from receipt. We will provide you with a full response within 40 working days from the date we received your complaint. We rely on volunteers e.g. Board members or Ethics Committee to support us in managing complaints. Given this and the complexity of some areas like EDI or power some complaints may take a little time. If there are any extenuating circumstances meaning that there will be a delay in our response, for instance staff absence, we will let you know and give you time when you can expect to receive it.

To help us deal with your complaint as quickly and thoroughly as possible, please provide your contact details and explain your concerns as clearly and in as much detail as you can. In some cases, we may need to gather more information from you to conduct a full investigation. A prompt response to this will assist us in dealing with your complaint as quickly as possible.

If you are dissatisfied with the response at Stage 2 you can move to Stage 3.

Stage 3

If you do not feel that your complaint was responded to adequately at Stage 2, you can appeal to the AFSP's CEO to review it. At Stage 3 your letter will be acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt. We aim to update you on the status of your appeal no later than 28 days from receipt and provide a full written response within 40 working days. If for any reason this timeframe is delayed, you will be informed and kept updated.



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If there is any new information that you didn't include during your initial complaint, or there is a reason that you think the procedure was unfair, you should state this in your letter.

This is the final stage of the process, and any decision made is final.

If your complaint is about the AFSP's CEO any appeal will go to the Chair of the Board to review.

If you are still not satisfied this does not affect your right to complain to the UKCP, to the Charity Commission or to action under the Equality Act 2010.

Monitoring Compliments, Concerns and Complaints

All feedback will be recorded regardless of any outcome. This enables AFSP to analyse what happened, perhaps what could have happened, and to learn and develop from this.

A report will be prepared by the Operations and Finance Director providing an overview of any feedback. For any concerns or complaints received, this will provide an overview of the issue/s raised and how it was resolved. The report will also set out the findings and suggest any recommendations for measures to be taken to prevent further complaints or to improve or adapt what is offered.

This will be reported to the Board as a regular agenda item and quarterly reviews will look for any patterns or trends that may emerge.

Frivolous, Vexations or Malicious Complaints

All complaints will be treated seriously, however, under these rules a complaint may be rejected at any time, if in the opinion of the Manager handling the case, the complaint is frivolous, vexatious or malicious. Vexatious complaints can cause substantial disruption to our work and can take up a disproportionate cost and time to manage. Vexatious complaints may also be used to describe complaints that are persistent, frivolous or malicious. You will be notified in writing with an explanation.

You will be informed that AFSP will not enter into any further communication concerning the complaint. We will advise you of your rights to take the complaint to another body, where appropriate, and how to do this. All correspondence received by you will be retained digitally in accordance with AFSP's data retention policy and will form part of the Chair's report to the AGM without you being identified.



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However, even if your complaint is found to be vexatious this does not preclude you from raising a separate complaint. This is important as we may be contacted by individuals who may be going through a difficult time or who are unwell and may genuinely not think that their complaint is vexatious. Whether a complaint is vexatious will be determined on a case-by-case basis. In assessing this we will have regard to:

- whether its primary purpose is to cause distress, disturb or pressurise.
- whether the complaint seeks to revisit matter(s) already responded to. This includes situations where a multiple associated complaints are received with minor variations.
- whether there is an unwillingness to follow normal procedures and/or repeated attempts to contact senior staff or officers.
- whether there is a refusal to provide information requested relevant to the complaint.
- whether the administrative burdens are proportionate to the issues raised
- any intimidating, aggressive or threatening behaviour.

If you raise a complaint which is determined to be vexatious, it will be investigated internally. However, you will not be updated on how this investigation progresses unless it is upheld.

Duty of Care to Staff and Volunteers

AFSP has a duty to support and protect their mental wellbeing. All AFSP staff have a line manager, and the CEO is line-managed by the Chair. Concerns and complaints may form part of the line-management process, but once a complaint has been dealt with, the complainant will not receive further updates on how it is being progressed through line-management action or discussion.

Staff and volunteers are entitled to due process – AFSP must follow employment law and our own HR policies. A complaint may lead to an investigation and/or disciplinary action, but these are separate processes, and third parties do not dictate AFSP’s employment procedures and practices.



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Outcomes and Learning from Complaints

Sanctions and action following an upheld complaint.

AFSP is as equally obliged to make amends as an individual member. Possible consequences are: -

- A public apology to the complainant.
- A confidence vote by fellow officers, to be minuted.
- Resignation.
- Termination of membership.

Sharing learning from complaints., e.g. “The Chair of AFSP will report to members at AGM of all complaints received, their natures and the outcomes.”

Learning and outcomes can also include the following:

- Internal review of processes.
- Revise policies and procedures.
- Disciplinary action which may include an informal warning, formal written warning etc. Additional supervision at work.
- Training.
- CEO apology on behalf of the organisation.