

# Effective Communication Series

## - Communicating with Health



Please note: 'child' = 'child or young person'

Sometimes, where our children's needs are involved, speaking to professionals about our concerns can be a daunting task. This factsheet is designed to assist parent/carers to communicate your views, wishes and feelings and be able to participate as fully as possible in making decisions. This forms part of our [Effective Communication Series](#) and there are also factsheets for communicating with Social Care and schools. For more information about what we mean by effective communication and reasons why it is important please see our 'Communication with Schools' factsheet

### **If you are not happy with an NHS Service**

If you're unhappy with an NHS service, try and discuss your concerns early on with the provider of the service, as they may be able to sort the issue out quickly.

Most problems can be dealt with at this stage, but in some cases you may feel more comfortable speaking to someone not directly involved in your care. The following may be able to help you:

The [Patient Advice and Liaison Service \(PALS\)](#) is a free, confidential and independent service that you'll find in most hospitals. You can speak with a PALS member, who'll try to help you resolve issues informally with the hospital before you need to make a complaint. PALS can be particularly helpful if your issue is urgent and you need action immediately, such as a problem with the treatment or care you receive while in hospital.

[NHS Complaints Advocacy](#) - If you're making, or thinking about making, a complaint, an advocate can help you to write a complaint letter and attend meetings with you, but cannot make the complaint for you or give medical or legal advice. You can get advice from an advocate at any stage of the process. If you decide you need some support, you can search online for 'NHS complaints advocacy' in your area.

[Healthwatch](#) is an independent statutory body that ensures your feedback is taken seriously.

### **What should I include in my Complaint?**

If you have tried to communicate effectively but feel your concerns are not being heard, then you may want to consider writing a letter of concern or complaint. If you feel this is needed, the following may be useful:

- Complaints should normally be made within 12 months of an incident or of it coming to your attention. This time limit can be extended provided you have good reasons for not making the complaint sooner and it's possible to complete a fair investigation.
- You can make a complaint verbally, in writing or by email. If you make it verbally, a record of your complaint will be made and you'll be provided with a written copy.
- If you're complaining on behalf of someone else, include their written consent with your letter (if you're making your complaint in writing) as this will speed up the process. If the person cannot give their consent, for example, if they have died or lack mental capacity, or are a child who cannot complain for themselves, you may be able to complain for them.

- Keep your letter to the point and as short as possible.
- Try to work together with the professional(s) as far as possible to sort out the problem.
- List clearly the things you're complaining about. Write them down in date order, with as many factual details that you can. For example, if you are complaining about the behaviour of your GP or consultant at an appointment, write down:
  - the date and place of the appointment
  - the name of the professional
  - the names of anyone else who witnessed any unacceptable behaviour
- Back up everything that you write - keep any documents you get. You can attach copies of relevant documents to your letter.
- Try and keep it factual. Whilst you may be emotional, try not to make personal attacks if complaining about staff, rather any aspects of behaviour that were unacceptable and do stress the impact of action / inaction has had.

**IMPORTANT:** State the outcome you're hoping for. This could be as simple as an apology and an undertaking to behave differently in the future.

### Who can I complain to?

Everyone who provides an NHS service in England must have a complaints procedure. You can either complain to the NHS service **provider** directly (such as a GP, dentist surgery or hospital) or to the **commissioner** of the services, which is the body that pays for the NHS services you use. **You cannot complain to both.**

If you are concerned about the care your child is receiving, raise it with the team caring for your child. They will want to know if there is a problem or a concern so they can try to resolve it. If necessary, you can escalate your concern to a more senior team member.

Some hospitals offer family liaison nurses, who act as contacts between medical teams, nursing teams and families. You can ask the team caring for your child how to contact the family liaison nurse. For other complaints or if you have not been able to resolve your concerns with the provider, then you can complain to the commissioner of the service. For complaints about:

CARE SERVICES	SUCH AS...	CONTACT
Primary Care Services	Primary Care Services	Find your <a href="#">Local integrated Care Board</a> (ICB)
Secondary Care Services	hospital care, mental health services, out-of-hours services, NHS 111	
Community Services	District nursing	
Healthcare	Prison, military health services, and specialised services supporting people with rare & complex conditions	Tel: 0300 311 22 33 For more ways to contact: <a href="#">NHS England</a>
Public Health Organisations	Services that prevent disease, promote health and prolong life (such as Healthy Child programme)	Find you local council: Local Council
Use of <a href="#">Mental Health Act</a>	someone detained in hospital, put under guardianship or under a community treatment order	Care Quality Commission (CQC). More Information: <a href="https://rb.gy/1kw7ll">https://rb.gy/1kw7ll</a>

## What should I expect after I complain?

You should expect an acknowledgement and the offer of a discussion about the handling of your complaint within 3 working days of receiving your complaint.

If you accept, the discussion will cover the period within which a response to your complaint is likely to be sent. There's no set timeframe, and this will depend on the nature of your complaint.

If, in the end, the response is delayed for any reason, you should be kept informed.

Once your complaint has been investigated, you'll receive a written response. The response should set out the findings and, where appropriate, provide information about what's being done as a result of your complaint along with any apologies if errors have been made. It should also include information about how the complaint has been handled and details of your right to take your complaint to the relevant ombudsman.

## If you are not happy with the outcome...

If you've reached the end of the complaints process and are not happy with the organisation's final decision, you have the right to bring your complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) to look at. The PHSO makes final decisions on unresolved complaints about the NHS in England.

This organisation is independent of the NHS. For more information, call their helpline on 0345 015 4033 or visit the [Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman website](#).

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## Further Information

The [Ask Listen Do webpages](#) include information and films for autistic people and people with a learning disability, as well as families and organisations in health, social care and education.

[Tips on making a complaint to the NHS in England | Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman \(PHSO\)](#)

[Help to make a complaint - Healthwatch](#)

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## Service Statement

The role of the SENDIAS service is to ensure all parents, children and young people have access to impartial information, advice and support so they can make informed decisions related to their situation. Any information that is shared with the service is in confidence unless permission has been obtained to share this with any individuals, services and agencies that may be able to help in the circumstances. For more detail, view our [policies and privacy notice](#) on our website.

**How to contact us:** Tel: 0330 222 8555 / Email: [send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk) or [cyp.sendias@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:cyp.sendias@westsussex.gov.uk) (up to age 25) / Website: [www.westsussexsendias.org](http://www.westsussexsendias.org)

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or scan QR code:

