



YMCA Essex
Complaints & Compliments
Policy

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1. Introduction & Purpose

YMCA Essex actively welcomes feedback from all those who engage with our services. We are committed to listening to service users, children, parents, carers, staff, and external partners, and to using their experiences to shape and strengthen the quality of care and support we provide.

We believe everyone has the right to expect courtesy, transparency, and prompt attention to their needs and concerns. Suggestions for improvement are valued, and complaints are seen as constructive opportunities to learn, develop, and enhance our services. Likewise, compliments play an important role in recognising good practice, celebrating successes, and sharing what works well.

This Complaints and Compliments Policy sets out our approach to receiving, responding to, and learning from all forms of feedback, ensuring it informs continuous improvement across the organisation.

2. Definition of Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction—made verbally, in writing, or through any other means—regarding the quality of services provided by the organisation, including concerns about the actions, behaviour, or inaction of YMCA Essex staff or individuals acting on our behalf. A complaint may be raised by service users, children, parents, carers, or any person affected by our services.

Responsibility for Implementation

Executive Team: Responsible for ensuring effective governance, oversight, and consistent application of this policy.

All Staff: Responsible for understanding and adhering to the policy, responding to concerns professionally, and supporting a culture of openness and continuous improvement.

3. Principles

All staff at YMCA Essex are expected to observe, uphold, and actively promote the Complaints and Compliments system. Feedback is welcomed from service users, parents, carers, advocates, families, commissioners, and other professionals, ensuring all perspectives help shape and improve our services.

All service users, and where appropriate, their parents, carers, or families—will be provided with a copy of this policy in a format suitable to their needs. This may include accessible formats, simplified language, translations, or other user-friendly mediums.

The system is designed to:

Register and address concerns: Provide a clear process for raising formal complaints or requesting administrative review of decisions affecting service users.

Recognise excellence: Offer a way to acknowledge and celebrate good practice.

Support continuous improvement: Encourage active feedback that informs quality enhancement, identifies areas for development, and drives ongoing service improvement.

4. Procedure – Complaints

YMCA Essex is committed to addressing complaints promptly, fairly, and transparently.

Complaints may be raised by service users, parents, carers, advocates, or other stakeholders.

The process is designed to encourage informal resolution where possible, with clear escalation stages if needed.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Any service user, parent, advocate, or stakeholder who is concerned about any aspect of the service, a staff member, or provision should first discuss their concerns with a member of staff.

If the concern relates to a specific staff member, it should be raised with the on-duty Manager or Head of Service.

The aim at this stage is to resolve complaints informally whenever possible. The staff member receiving the concern should:

- Listen carefully and show understanding.
- Seek to resolve the issue during first contact if feasible.
- If immediate resolution is not possible, take ownership of the concern, reassure the complainant, and provide a clear timescale for follow-up and resolution.

Stage 2 – Written Complaint to Head of Service

If the concern is not resolved through Stage 1, or if the issue recurs, the complainant should submit their complaint in writing to the Head of Service for the relevant department.

Most complaints are resolved at this stage.

Stage 3 – Meeting with Head of Service

If the complaint remains unresolved, the complainant may request a meeting with the Head of Service. During this meeting:

- An agreed written record of the discussion is made.
- All parties present sign the record and receive a copy.

If the complaint is resolved, the Head of Service will provide written confirmation to the complainant within 5 working days. The signed record indicates that the procedure has concluded.

Stage 4 – Escalation to CEO

If agreement cannot be reached at Stage 3, the complainant may submit their disagreement in writing to the CEO. The CEO will review the complaint and respond within 5 working days.

Stage 5 – Escalation to the Board

If the complaint remains unresolved after Stage 4, the complainant may put their concerns in writing to the Board, stating why previous responses are unsatisfactory. The Board will respond within 5 working days.

Complaint Logging

All complaints will be recorded in the YMCA Complaints Register and stored digitally on SharePoint. The following information will be maintained:

- Date the complaint was made
- Allocated complaint log number
- Name and designation of the complainant
- Actions taken
- Resolution achieved
- Date resolved

5. Childcare Complaints and Ofsted

Complaints relating to our childcare settings and programs should follow the organisational stages of complaints outlined above. However, parents and carers may approach Ofsted directly at any stage if they feel it is necessary.

Where a concern indicates a possible breach of registration requirements, it is essential to involve Ofsted as the registering and inspection body, which has a statutory duty to ensure compliance with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirements.

Ofsted Contact Information:

General enquiries: 0300 123 1231

Complaints/concerns: 0300 123 4666

Website/online contact form: <https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/contact-us>

These details are clearly displayed on childcare notice boards within each setting to ensure accessibility for all parents and carers.

In cases where a child appears to be at risk of harm, YMCA Essex follows the procedures of the Local Authority Safeguarding Board. In these situations:

- Both the parent/carer and the setting are informed.
- The Childcare Services Manager works collaboratively with Ofsted and the Local Authority Safeguarding Board to ensure a thorough investigation.
- Appropriate actions are taken following the investigation to safeguard the child and address the complaint.

6. Compliments

YMCA Essex warmly welcomes compliments and feedback about the positive impact our services have on individuals' lives. Celebrating achievements—both big and small—alongside the people we support is one of the most rewarding aspects of our work.

Compliments:

- Recognise good practice
- Provide insight into what works well in particular situations
- Help improve services and identify effective solutions
- Contribute to staff motivation, achievement, and professional satisfaction

All compliments are recorded in the YMCA digital Compliments Folder, including letters, emails, or messages of appreciation. These may be shared with:

- Other service users
- Staff, both current and new
- Professionals and partners
- Individuals interested in accessing YMCA Essex services in the future

Managers collate and review compliments and pass this information to the Chief Executive, ensuring recognition of good practice and contributing to continuous organisational improvement.

7. Malicious or Vexatious Complaints

YMCA Essex is committed to addressing all complaints fairly, transparently, and in good faith.

Where a complaint appears to be knowingly false, malicious, vexatious, or made in bad faith, a preliminary assessment will be conducted to determine whether the complaint should proceed.

If there is evidence that a complaint has been made with deliberate intent to mislead, harm, or harass, the organisation reserves the right to:

- Discontinue the complaints process for that issue
- Address the matter under relevant staff conduct or disciplinary procedures
- Pursue legal action or involve the police where appropriate

It is important to note that a complaint will not be considered malicious or vexatious simply because it is unsubstantiated or not upheld.

8. Scope and Exclusions

YMCA Essex will accept and investigate all complaints in good faith. However, there are circumstances where a complaint may not be investigated under this policy, including:

- **Time limits:** Complaints not raised within a reasonable timeframe (generally 6 months of the incident), unless there are exceptional circumstances
- **Legal proceedings:** Issues that are, or have been, subject to ongoing or concluded legal proceedings
- **Insurance claims:** Matters that are the subject of an insurance claim
- **Previously considered complaints:** Issues that have already been fully considered under this policy.
- **Unreasonable pursuit:** Complaints being pursued in a persistent or unreasonable manner.
- **Outside control:** Complaints about services or decisions outside the organisation's control.

Where a complaint is excluded under this policy, the complainant will be informed promptly in writing, including the reason for exclusion and any alternative avenues available.