

## Formal complaints

If someone who works for you makes a bullying or discrimination complaint and it needs to be handled formally, you should follow a formal procedure.

For example, you will need to deal with it formally if:

- your employee is not willing to try to resolve it informally
- your organisation's policy says the type of situation they're complaining about must be dealt with formally
- the complaint is very serious
- the situation could lead to disciplinary action against another employee

You should follow a formal grievance procedure, unless your organisation has a different formal procedure for the specific type of complaint you're handling. For example, you might have a formal procedure specifically for handling sexual harassment complaints.

[Find out how to follow a formal grievance procedure](#)

## Decide who will investigate the complaint

As part of a formal procedure, someone will need to investigate the complaint.

They should be neutral and not involved in the complaint.

If this is not possible, for example in a small business, the person investigating must keep an open mind and carry out a fair investigation.

Alternatively, you could pay for an external person to investigate, for example someone trained to handle workplace investigations and conflict resolution.

[Find out more about investigating a complaint](#)

## If you need to separate or protect employees

In some circumstances, you might need to separate the employees involved while you handle a formal complaint. You should make sure any temporary move is done fairly.

For example, you might temporarily move one of them to a different shift or location. You should not move the person who made the complaint unless they ask to be moved. This is because moving them when they have not asked for a move could be seen as a punishment for complaining.

## If you think you need to suspend someone

You should think very carefully before suspending someone as there may be other options.

[Find out more about suspension during an investigation](#)

## **If you need to consider disciplinary action**

If the outcome of your formal procedure means you need to consider disciplinary action against an employee, you should follow a [formal disciplinary procedure](#).

## **Contact the Acas helpline**

If you have any questions about handling a bullying or discrimination complaint formally, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).

Related content

[Answering your employee's questions about discrimination](#)