

Informal complaints

As an employer or manager, you should try to resolve a complaint of bullying or discrimination informally if possible.

Dealing with it informally means taking steps to resolve the complaint without using a formal grievance procedure.

You should have already talked to the person who raised the issue to help decide the best approach together.

In some cases, you will need to [deal with a complaint formally](#) instead.

Ways of resolving the complaint informally

You'll need to consider the most appropriate action to take. This will depend on the circumstances of the complaint and what you've learned about it so far.

You might need to agree this with other people, for example the person who made the complaint.

Where it's appropriate, you might:

- have a private conversation with the person who's been complained about
- arrange a meeting with everyone involved
- offer mediation

Talk to the person who's been complained about

If the person's complaint is about another employee's behaviour, talk separately in private with the person they've complained about.

Sometimes this can also help to:

- repair working relationships
- make it clear what counts as acceptable behaviour

For example:

- a line manager or someone in HR might be able to talk to someone in private to say their conduct was inappropriate
- a manager might be able to explain to the person the complaint is about how their behaviour made someone feel, and see if they'd be willing to apologise

It might be that they've upset someone or caused offence without intending to. Explaining this and agreeing with them how they'll behave in future could be all that's needed.

You might need a few conversations with both employees to agree a way forward.

If they dispute what happened or do not agree to make any change, you'll need to take a different approach. For example, you could try to resolve it informally in another way, or try to resolve it formally. It will depend on the circumstances.

Holding a meeting with the people involved

Depending on the situation, you might feel it's appropriate to arrange an informal meeting.

For example, meeting with both:

- the person who made the complaint
- the person the complaint is about

Before arranging this, you should meet with everyone separately first. Make sure they're all willing to meet together to try to resolve the complaint.

If you have a meeting, you should:

- give everyone enough notice of the meeting
- hold the meeting in a private place
- listen to what everyone has to say
- take everyone's views into consideration
- work towards resolving the issue in a way that everyone can accept
- make sure any agreed outcome is consistent with similar situations in the past
- keep notes of any agreed actions

If you cannot agree on an outcome in the meeting, you should continue to try to resolve the issue afterwards. For example, you might approach everyone again and suggest a different way to resolve the issue.

Using mediation

If your employees agree, you could try mediation. Mediation involves an independent, impartial person helping both sides to try to find a solution.

For example, mediation can be useful if there's been a:

- misunderstanding
- lack of awareness of how someone's actions are affecting someone else

[Find out more about mediation](#)

If the issue is resolved

If the issue is resolved informally, you should:

- keep a record of the actions taken and the outcomes
- keep in touch with the person who made the complaint to check things are still okay

If no further action is needed

At any stage in an informal process, you might decide there is no need for action or further steps.

If so, you should:

- keep a written record of this decision and the reasons why

- update the person who made the complaint, and explain why you decided no action is needed

If you need to take it further

If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, you or the employee might decide to take it further as a [formal complaint](#).

This decision can be made at any point during the informal process.

Contact the Acas helpline

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

Related content

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