

Talking with your employer about a problem

How to raise a problem

If you have a problem at work you can raise it formally or informally with your employer. It's usually best to try raising it informally first.

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

You might feel nervous about raising a problem. But employers are often open to resolving problems quickly without going through a formal procedure.

Raising a problem informally can often:

- resolve it more quickly
- help maintain positive relationships at work

You can [raise the problem formally](#) if:

- you cannot resolve it through informal steps
- you feel it is too serious to raise informally

Check your organisation's policy

Before raising a problem with your employer, it's a good idea to check any policy they have that's relevant to your situation.

For example, you could check your employer's absence policy, if your problem is about taking leave.

The policy might:

- give you some information that resolves your problem
- say how to raise a problem and who you can speak to

Talk with your employer

You should talk to someone you feel comfortable with where possible. For example your line manager, another manager or someone in HR.

An informal discussion with your manager or employer can range from a private conversation to a more structured meeting.

Get support

If you need more support with resolving your problem, you could speak to:

- a fair treatment ambassador, if your organisation has one
- a trade union representative, if you're a member
- your employer's HR department, if they have one

If you need emotional support, your work might have:

- mental health first aiders
- health and wellbeing representatives
- an employee assistance programme (EAP)

What your employer should do

When you talk to your employer about a problem, they should take it seriously and look into it as soon as possible.

They might be able to resolve the problem straight away. For example if it's a misunderstanding about pay.

If they cannot resolve the problem straight away, your employer should arrange an informal meeting with you.

A meeting can help them:

- find out more about the issue
- talk to you about the best way to resolve the problem

[Find out more about informal meetings](#)

If the problem is about someone you work with

If you have a problem with someone you work with, your employer has different options to deal with the situation. They should discuss these with you and, if possible, agree with you what they will do.

They could start by having a private conversation with the other person to discuss the problem. Often this is enough to resolve matters, especially if someone has upset you without meaning to.

If your employer finds the problem is more complicated, they might talk with you again to try to agree what to do next.

Your employer might suggest holding an informal meeting with you and the other person. They should agree this with you in advance so you know what to expect and can prepare for it.

Using mediation

Mediation is used to resolve disagreements around workplace relationships rather than other disputes, such as pay or issues related to dismissal or conduct.

It involves an independent, impartial person helping both sides to try to find a solution to a problem.

Employers can use mediation to resolve:

- bullying and harassment
- communication problems
- personality clashes
- relationship breakdowns

[Find out more about mediation](#)

Raising the problem formally

You can raise the problem formally if:

- you've already tried to resolve things informally but it did not work
- you feel the situation is too serious to be resolved informally

Your employer might want to deal with the problem formally if they feel it is very serious. They cannot insist that you raise it formally but they can still investigate it and take appropriate action.

Raising a problem formally is known as 'raising a grievance'.

If you decide to go straight to raising a grievance, your employer might encourage you to try informal resolution first. However, they should allow you to raise a problem formally if that's what you want.

If you cannot agree on an approach together, your employer should deal with it formally.

[Find out more about raising a grievance](#)

If the problem is not resolved

If your problem is not resolved by trying informal or formal steps, you might be able to make a claim to an [employment tribunal](#).

Contact the Acas helpline

If you have any questions about raising a problem at work, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).