

**ALTON COUNSELLING SERVICE
POLICY DOCUMENT
CLIENT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

Purpose:

This procedure will be used to investigate and resolve a complaint by a client against Alton Counselling Service (the Service).

Policy:

The Service aims to treat clients with consideration and respect and to act within the Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).

All complaints made by clients will be taken seriously and given due consideration.

Confidentiality:

1. All aspects of any complaint will be dealt with in a confidential manner.
2. The complainant and the person complained against will be kept aware of the extent and detail of any information divulged to the other, which will be on a need-to-know basis.
3. The maintenance of the file and administration of the procedure in connection with a complaint will be the responsibility of a named individual, normally the Head of Counselling (referred to as the Head of Counselling in this document).
4. The complainant and the person complained against will be given the name and position of the Head of Counselling and be informed that they will be responsible for the conduct of the complaint proceedings.

Initial Procedure:

1. Any complaint made on the telephone or in person should be reported to the Head of Counselling at the earliest opportunity and a note of the date and person receiving the complaint should be made on the Client File.
2. The Head of Counselling will contact the complainant to discuss the nature of the complaint. If they wish to pursue the complaint the Head of Counselling will send them a copy of the Complaints Procedure and advise them that they should send a formal, written statement laying out the matters which give rise to the complaint.
3. If the complainant declines to pursue the complaint the date of the conversation and nature of the complaint will be entered on the Client's File by the Head of Counselling and the person complained against and their supervisor will be informed.
4. Internal disciplinary procedures may be put into effect if considered necessary.
5. Any written complaint received from a client regarding the work of the Service by any person working for the Service should be passed to the Head of Counselling as soon as possible and, in any case, within a week of receipt. A formal record will be made on the Client File.

Formal Procedure - Stage One:

1. When a written complaint is received, the Head of Counselling will write a letter acknowledging receipt within seven days. The counsellor concerned and their supervisor will be informed of the complaint and a meeting will be arranged, either together or separately with the Head of Counselling, to discuss the complaint. The Director will be informed that a formal complaint has been made.
2. A second letter will be sent to the client advising them that discussion has taken place with the counsellor concerned and offering an opportunity for formal discussion of the complaint with the Head of Counselling. This meeting should take place not more than four weeks after receipt of the written complaint.
3. The complainant will have the right to be accompanied at the meeting by one other person of their choice but that person will not actively participate in the meeting.
4. If the complaint is resolved at the meeting, the client, counsellor, supervisor and Director will receive written confirmation that the matter is resolved.
5. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the meeting, they will be asked to give a written statement to this effect to the Head of Counselling, and the complaint will move to Stage 2.

Formal Procedure - Stage Two:

The purpose of this stage is to review the conduct of the complaint; to ensure that procedure has been followed correctly; to provide the client with an opportunity to contest the decision of the Head of Counselling; to arrive at a final ruling for the resolution of the complaint.

1. The Head of Counselling will inform the Director of the continuing complaint, the Director will inform the Management Committee and Chair of Trustees, and will write to the client and person complained against advising them that the procedure has moved to Stage Two.
2. The Chair of Trustees will convene a panel comprising a Trustee, a member of the Management Committee (not the Head of Counselling) and a person external to the Service, with relevant experience, agreed by the Head of Counselling and the Client. A meeting date will be set for the meeting to take place, within six weeks of the decision to move to Stage Two.
3. The panel will be provided with all relevant paperwork prior to the date of the meeting. The client, person complained against, and the Head of Counselling will be given the opportunity to attend and may be questioned by the panel. The client and person complained against can be joined by one person of their choice but that person may not actively participate.
4. The findings of the panel, in the form of a written report, will be conveyed to the Chair of Trustees; the Management Committee; the client and person complained against. In the event of the client being dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage Two, the Chair of Trustees will inform the complainant that the Service has exhausted its procedure and that they may refer their complaint to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Note: Counselling sessions will be suspended when the complaint moves to Formal Procedure Stage Two. At the discretion of the Head of Counselling, all client work of the counsellor complained against may be suspended during investigations.