

# Helping children and young people to...

# Speak up and make a complaint

Making complaints can be frightening for children and young people – adults can help them through the process and encourage them.

Adults can also prompt others in organisations to find a solution to the issue or concern.

## What's a complaint?

*Speaking up when unhappy about an organisation's service, the conduct of its staff or another child or young person, or the way a prior concern was handled.*



These tips are based on what children and young people say helps them...

*"A supportive adult is an approachable person with a compassionate and open mind."*  
Young person

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### Be a supportive adult

Many children and young people will seek help from an adult they trust when they're not happy or have a problem.

They will raise concerns in different ways and may not be aware they can make a complaint, or that an adult can help them throughout the process. Be proactive – ask them about the organisations they go to, and their experiences there. Be mindful that changes in their behaviour or non-verbal cues can mean they're not happy about something. Encourage them to talk about any problems they're having.

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### Talk to children and young people about their rights

Part of being a trusted adult is understanding children and young people have rights, including the right to:

- Be safe
- Be included
- Raise concerns
- Be treated with kindness and respect
- Have their views valued.

Let them know that adults – and organisations – have a responsibility to make sure these rights are met and make changes when they're not. Encourage them to give feedback – compliments and complaints – to the organisations and services they visit.



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### Be a supportive listener

Be patient, let them use their own words and don't dismiss their concerns.

Children and young people often raise lower-level concerns with adults before they feel comfortable talking about difficult problems or disclosing harm. They may even be testing you to build trust or to see if you believe them.



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### Be honest about what you don't know

It's not always possible to fully resolve a complaint or achieve immediate change, so don't make promises you can't keep.

However it's important for children and young people to know that speaking up and making a complaint is a way of exercising their rights.

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### Seek information if you need to

Sometimes it's not obvious where to make a complaint. It's usually best to talk to the organisation in question first.

Let the child or young person know if you need to get more information. You can:

- Talk to someone in the organisation you feel comfortable with, or look for a complaints system on their website.
- Ask for any information they have on their complaints process – options available, time frames, who to speak to, who is involved. This could save you or the child from having to tell the story multiple times.
- Ask for any additional assistance you or the child or young person might need (interpreter, disability access, regional access).



**Different ways you can make a complaint:**

- face-to-face
- by phone
- in writing
- online.



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## Help the child or young person to be clear about their complaint

Ask:

- What they're not happy about.
- How the problem has made them feel.
- What would help fix the problem.
- What they'd like to happen.
- How you can best support them during and after the complaint.

Practise conversation starters and plan what you're going to say. Encourage them to use their own words and phrases, and plan any questions. They could write or draw what they're not happy about. Any notes you make will help if you need to tell more than one person – they can help to remind everyone what's been said before.

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## Make the complaint to the organisation

- Stay calm even if the child or young person gets upset or the organisation doesn't respond well at first.
- Remember that everyone should treat each other respectfully.
- Be clear on what you'd like to happen.
- Take in any notes you prepared and write down what's discussed in the meeting.
- Record who you make the complaint to, the dates, anything they promise to do and the date they say they will get back to you as this will help you keep track. You can also note feelings or feedback about the complaint process which may be useful later.



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## Ask the organisation questions

- Who will be told? Many children and young people will not want to be identified if possible.
- Who will follow up and keep us informed about progress?
- How long will it take?
- If we're not happy with the outcome, what's the next step? Who will look at the complaint then?
- How will they make sure you or the child are not treated differently because of your complaint?



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## Keep at it and complain further if needed

Ask the organisation about other options if they don't fully resolve the issue, including referring to a governing or national body or Ombudsman. Ask the child or young person if they want to provide any feedback on their experience of making the complaint.



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## Keep the conversations with children and young people going

Check in to see how they're feeling after the complaints process. Children and young people need to know they will be supported during and after the complaint, and that it can be a positive and empowering experience.

Speaking up is important.  
It can make a difference.



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## Other organisations you can go to:

### Advice for parents

Parentline or equivalent in your State or Territory

> [parentline.com.au](http://parentline.com.au)

### Online and phone counselling for children and young people

Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800 or [counsellor@kidshelpline.com.au](mailto:counsellor@kidshelpline.com.au)

> [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

### Mental health support for children and young people

headspace and eheadspace

> [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)

### Information about children's rights

Australian Human Rights Commission

> [childsafesafe.humanrights.gov.au](http://childsafesafe.humanrights.gov.au)

### Complaints about a government organisation

Search online for Children's Commissioner / Guardian or Ombudsman in your State or Territory

### Help for non-English speaking people

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) National

> [tisonational.gov.au](http://tisonational.gov.au)

Contact details:

[childsafesafe.pmc.gov.au/children-speak](http://childsafesafe.pmc.gov.au/children-speak)

