



Abercorn Clinic Complaints Policy

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Policy Approver:	Patricia Sheridan and The Board

1. Purpose of Policy

Abercorn Clinic is committed to providing high-quality care to all our clients. We value your feedback and aim to resolve any concerns promptly and fairly. This policy outlines the process for making a complaint about our services.

2. Policy Statement

Abercorn Clinic is committed to providing high quality services whilst working in a fair, accessible, open and accountable way that builds the trust and respect of all its stakeholders. One of the ways in which it can continue to improve its services is by listening and responding to the views of its clients; staff; parents and carers; professional associates; and members of the public. Abercorn Clinic views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right.

The Clinic aims to ensure that:

- making a complaint is as easy as possible;
- it treats a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction;
- it deals with all complaints seriously and, when appropriate, confidentially;
- it ensures that all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way;
- it learns from complaints and uses them to improve its service(s).

It is recognised that many concerns will be raised informally. Abercorn Clinic aims to:

- resolve informal concerns quickly;
- keep matters low-key;
- enable mediation between the complainant and any individual to whom the complaint has been referred.

An informal approach is appropriate when it can be achieved. If concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal complaints procedure will be followed.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all staff, associates, contractors, volunteers, and any other individuals acting on behalf of Abercorn Clinic.

Complaints can be made in writing (letter, email), verbally (in person or by phone), or anonymously.

- **In writing:** Address your complaint to the Practice Manager at Abercorn Clinic or contact@aberncorn.org.uk
- **Verbally:** You can speak to a member of staff at the clinic or request a meeting with the Practice Manager.
- **Anonymously:** You can use our anonymous suggestion box located at Reception.

We encourage you to include as much detail as possible in your complaint, such as:

- The date(s) of the incident(s) you are complaining about
- The names of any staff members involved (if known)
- A clear description of your concerns
- Any desired outcome

Complaints made by a representative on behalf of a client are acceptable, provided that the service user has given explicit, written, and signed consent for the representative to act on their behalf and for their confidential clinical information to be shared during the investigation.

We advise complainants to bring forward concerns as soon as possible, as older events are inherently harder to accurately investigate. A complainant has a maximum of six months from the date of the event to submit a complaint. Any complaint regarding events older than six months will be considered by the Clinical Director.

Complainants will be supported by a member of the Abercorn team through the process, answering any questions that may arise and signposted to relevant support services (i.e advocacy) as required.

A complaint can be discontinued if the complainant fails or refuses to participate at any stage of the complaint procedure without good reason, or the complainant formally withdraws the Complaint. This would result in both parties being informed.

Anonymous Complaints

a) Process for Submission

Abercorn Clinic recognises that there are circumstances under which a complainant may wish to raise a concern but remain anonymous.

- Anonymous complaints must be submitted in writing and placed into the secure physical Client Feedback / Suggestion Box located in the clinic reception area.

b) Extent to Which They Will Be Dealt With

All anonymous complaints will be reviewed by the Practice Manager to assess their severity and validity. They will be dealt with as follows:

- If the complaint points to a general service issue, environmental concern, or policy layout (e.g., waiting room accessibility or signage clarity), it will be investigated fully, and appropriate rectifications will be made.
- If the complaint concerns a specific incident involving an unnamed therapist or client, it will be handled as a quality assurance flag. While a formal investigation cannot be fully executed due to missing context, the issue will be explicitly raised during Clinical Supervision or Staff Appraisals to monitor ongoing practice and ensure client safety.

c) Addressing Limitations of Anonymity

To balance fairness and transparency, the clinic addresses the inherent limitations of anonymous complaints through the following structured boundaries:

- Because the clinic cannot issue its mandatory 14-day acknowledgment or 10-day formal resolution letter to an unidentifiable individual, the final outcome cannot be directly communicated back. To mitigate this, any structural improvements made as a result of anonymous feedback will be summary-reported to the Board of Directors in the clinic's quarterly compliance reviews.
- An anonymous complaint will never be used as the sole basis for taking formal disciplinary action against a staff member, as the employee has a right to review the specific evidence against them. It will instead trigger an internal review or observation period.
- If an anonymous complaint lacks actionable details (such as dates, times, or names of the parties involved), the clinic may be severely limited and forced to log and close the file due to an inability to validate the claims. The clinic visibly displays guidelines at reception to encourage anonymous writers to be as factually specific as possible.

Complaints Against Former Workers

If a formal complaint is received regarding an individual who has since left employment or association with Abercorn Clinic, the clinic will proceed in accordance with the following framework:

a) Investigation for Organisational Learning

The clinic will not automatically drop or dismiss a complaint simply because the staff member or therapist has left. An internal investigation will still be conducted by an appointed officer. The primary purpose of this investigation is organisational learning—specifically to identify

any systemic failures, review clinic procedures, and ensure the ongoing safety and quality of service delivery.

b) Opportunity for Representation

Abercorn Clinic believes in a fair and balanced process for all parties. Wherever practically possible, the clinic will make reasonable attempts to contact the former worker at their last known address or email to notify them of the complaint. They will be officially offered the opportunity to respond to the allegations and represent their own interest during the

Vexatious or Malicious Complaints

While Abercorn Clinic supports an open culture for genuine concerns, it protects its staff and resources from the abuse of this policy.

a) Definitions

- **Vexatious Complaint:** Raised without sufficient grounds, serving solely to cause annoyance, disruption, or frustration.
- **Malicious Complaint:** Contains intentionally false or fabricated allegations made in bad faith to damage a staff member's or the clinic's reputation.

b) Handling Protocol

If senior management suspects a complaint is vexatious or malicious, the following actions apply:

- The complaint is immediately escalated to the Practice Manager and the Board of Directors.
- If malice or harassment is explicitly confirmed, the clinic will terminate the investigation immediately. The complainant will be notified in writing that the file is closed.
- Affected staff members will receive full professional and psychological support. No record of the malicious complaint will remain on their permanent personnel file.

c) Consequences

- Future communication boundaries will be established. The clinic may seek legal counsel or report defamation and harassment to the authorities.
- Fabricating a complaint against a colleague is a severe breach of professional conduct and the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy. The matter will be handled under the clinic's formal Disciplinary Policy, up to and including summary dismissal.

4. Definitions

A complaint can be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with Abercorn Clinic's staff or service(s), no matter how expressed and whether justified or not, that requires a response or further action on the part of the Clinic. A complaint may be resolved informally.

If the matter is work-related and deemed more serious, then a formal grievance should be raised using the Grievance policy and procedure.

Where wrongdoing at work affects others, eg, affecting the general public (legally known as

“making a disclosure in the public interest”), then the Whistle-blowing policy and procedure should be followed.

5. Procedure

The complaint pathway consists of an initial informal approach and three subsequent formal stages:

Informal Resolution

Initial difficulties should be dealt with immediately by the individual member of staff involved. Staff will attempt to resolve the issue directly to prevent unnecessary escalation. If an informal resolution cannot be achieved or is inappropriate due to the seriousness of the issue, the formal procedure is triggered.

There are 3 stages to the Complaints procedure:

- (i) Stage One – Complaint
- (ii) Stage Two – Investigation
- (iii) Stage Three – Appeal

After any informal stage, the complainant and the complained against, will not come into contact at any time in the course of the investigation.

(i) Stage One - Complaint

Informal complaints are usually difficulties that can be dealt with by an individual member of staff or manager. Staff should try to resolve the issue without escalation to a formal complaint, although it is recognised that not all complaints can be dealt with informally and if the matter is of a more serious nature, then the complaint will be treated as a formal complaint.

A formal complaint should be made in writing, addressed to the Practice Manager. Young people wishing to make a complaint should be offered support by a member of staff who can assist them in writing the complaint.

If the young person does not wish to make the complaint directly to Abercorn Clinic they can make the complaint via their parent, social worker, Who Cares?, Childline, the children rights officer from their local authority, Care Inspectorate, or Education Scotland.

Any formal complaint should include the complainant's name and address; the nature and date of the complaint; and how they wish to see it resolved. Complaints should be signed by the complainant.

By submitting a formal complaint, the complainant gives explicit permission for confidential information pertinent to the complaint to be disclosed by all cited parties to those involved in handling and investigating the matter.

If the complainant is unsure who to contact, they can write / email to:

Head of Support Services
Abercorn Clinic
11 Fairbairn Road
Livingston
EH54 6TS

hr@abercorn.org.uk

All formal complaints will be acknowledged within 14 working days of receipt. The Head of Support Services will liaise with other relevant Senior Manager(s) and an investigating officer will be appointed.

(ii) Stage Two - Investigation

All complaints at this stage will be fully investigated, with a recommendation report provided to the Head of Support Services and / or relevant Senior Manager. A written response will be provided to the complainant within 10 working days by the Head of Support Services / relevant Senior Manager, and will contain details of the recommendation(s) made, such as reviewing of policies, staff development and training, or appropriate improvement to the Clinic's services.

If any conflict of interest arises, it can be declared by any involved party to the Head of Support Services/ relevant Senior Manager, who will be responsible for assessing and resolving the matter.

Occasionally investigations may take longer, particularly if the complaint is complex. Should this be the case, a holding letter will be sent after 10 working days to the complainant which will contain a final date given for a conclusion to be reached.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome from Stage Two they can appeal within 7 working days of the date of the outcome, and progress to Stage Three. Appeals from Stage Two should be made to the Head of Support Services, contact details as above, who will initiate the Appeal process.

If legal action is required the internal investigation process has to be paused to not interfere with the processes required. The relevant parties will be informed of this as necessary.

(iii) Stage Three - Appeal

If the complaint cannot be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at Stage Two, the complainant may appeal to the Managing Director, who will review the appeal grounds and provide the claimant with the outcome in writing within 10 working days. The decision reached about the complaint will be final.

Abercorn Clinic is regulated by Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS). Clients can contact HIS at any time if they have a complaint or concerns. Healthcare Improvement Scotland details are:

Independent Healthcare Services Team
Healthcare Improvement Scotland
Gyle Square
1 South Gyle Crescent
Edinburgh

EH12 9EB

Email: his.ihcregulation@nhs.scot

6. Responsibilities

Head of Clinical Operations:

- Overseeing the entire complaints process.
- Ensuring the policy is clear, accessible, and in compliance with relevant regulations.
- Appointing investigators and overseeing investigations.
- Communicating with the complainant throughout the process.
- Implementing any agreed-upon resolutions.
- Reviewing the complaints procedure regularly and making necessary adjustments.

Clinician:

- Addressing client concerns promptly and professionally.
- Following the clinic's complaints procedure.
- Cooperating fully with the investigation process.
- Learning from complaints to improve their practice.

Investigator:

- Conducting a fair and impartial investigation.
- Gathering evidence and interviewing relevant parties.
- Documenting the investigation thoroughly.
- Preparing a report with findings and recommendations.

Reception/Administrative Staff:

- Providing information about the complaints procedure to clients.
- Accepting and logging complaints.
- Assisting with the administrative aspects of the complaints process.

7. Enforcement / Compliance

We will treat all complaints confidentially, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

This policy complies with relevant legislation in Scotland, including the Patients' Rights Act (Scotland) 2002.