



DVACT-PAI
Assessments & Interventions

Complaints, Concerns and Compliments: Guide for Professionals

For professionals who
refer children and
families to DVACT-PAI



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Complaints, Concerns and Compliments: Guide for Professionals

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Complaints, Concerns and Compliments: Guide for Professionals:

For professionals who refer children and families to DVACT-PAI

Our Commitment

Your feedback helps us improve.

We welcome professional challenge, complaints, concerns and compliments because they help us maintain safe, effective and accountable services for children and families.

No professional should feel discouraged from raising a genuine concern about safety, quality or professional practice.

1. Purpose of this Guide

DVACT-PAI is committed to providing safe, respectful, professional and high-quality services to children and families.

We work with professionals, including family court solicitors, social workers, children's services, Cafcass professionals and other agencies, who may refer parents to us for specialist domestic abuse assessments, interventions and programmes.

We recognise that professionals who work with us may sometimes have concerns about our service, our processes or the way a matter has been handled. We also value positive feedback and compliments because they help us understand what we are doing well.

This guide explains:

- how professionals can raise a complaint or concern;
- how concerns will be handled;
- what information we may need;
- how safeguarding concerns should be raised;
- how we respond to complaints involving our staff or practitioners;
- how professionals can provide compliments and positive feedback;
- how we use complaints and compliments to improve our services.

Our aim is to make raising a concern straightforward, proportionate and accessible.

2. Who Can Make a Complaint or Raise a Concern?

A complaint or concern may be raised by any professional who has contact with, refers to, commissions or works alongside DVACT-PAI.

This may include:

- family court solicitors;
- barristers;
- social workers;
- children's services professionals;
- Cafcass professionals;
- family support workers;
- domestic abuse professionals;
- probation professionals;
- health professionals;
- education professionals;

- commissioners;
- other referring agencies;
- professionals working with a child or parent receiving our services.

You do not need to be directly responsible for a case to raise a concern if you believe that an issue may affect the safety, wellbeing or quality of service provided to a child or family.

Where appropriate, we may also accept complaints from service users, parents, children and other people affected by our services. Separate information may be available for service users about how they can make a complaint.

3. What Can I Complain About?

You can raise a complaint or concern about any aspect of our service, including:

Service quality

For example:

- concerns about the quality or appropriateness of an assessment;
- concerns about the delivery of a programme or intervention;
- concerns about whether the service provided was consistent with what had been commissioned;
- concerns about professional standards or conduct;
- concerns about delays or failures to communicate.

Communication

For example:

- difficulties contacting the organisation;
- failure to respond within an appropriate timeframe;
- concerns about communication with referring professionals;
- information not being communicated clearly or appropriately.

Professional conduct

For example:

- concerns about the behaviour or conduct of a member of staff or practitioner;
- concerns about professionalism;
- concerns about inappropriate comments or behaviour;
- concerns about boundaries or conflicts of interest.

Safeguarding and risk

Concerns may also relate to:

- the safety or welfare of a child;
- domestic abuse risk;
- concerns about a parent's safety;
- failure to respond appropriately to a safeguarding concern.

Safeguarding concerns should not be delayed while waiting for the formal complaints process.

If you believe that a child or adult is at immediate risk of harm, you should contact the appropriate emergency or safeguarding service without delay and, where appropriate, inform DVACT-PAI.

4. What Is Not Normally a Complaint?

Some matters may be better dealt with through another process.

For example:

- a request for additional information about a report;
- a request for clarification of an assessment;
- a request for information that was not included in a referral;
- a request to correct a factual error;
- a disagreement about a professional opinion;
- a request to amend a report because a professional does not agree with its conclusions.

Where possible, we will try to resolve these matters informally and promptly.

However, if the concern relates to the quality, integrity, conduct or safety of our service, it may be appropriate to treat it as a formal complaint.

5. Complaints About Professional Opinions or Assessments

Domestic abuse assessments and programmes can involve complex professional judgements.

We recognise that referring professionals may not always agree with an assessment, recommendation or professional opinion.

A difference of professional opinion does not automatically mean that the service provided was inadequate.

Where you disagree with an assessment, you should normally:

1. identify the specific part of the assessment or report with which you disagree;
2. explain the factual or professional basis for your concern;
3. provide any relevant information that you believe may have been overlooked;
4. allow the practitioner or organisation an opportunity to consider and respond.

We will not change a professional opinion simply because another professional disagrees with it.

Any amendment to an assessment or report will be based on appropriate evidence, professional standards and the integrity of the assessment process.

Where a complaint concerns the independence or integrity of an assessment, it will be reviewed appropriately and, where necessary, by someone who was not directly involved in the original decision.

6. How to Make a Complaint

Where possible, complaints should be submitted in writing.

You can contact:

Complaints Lead
Claire Verney
DVACT-PAI
claireverney.pai@dvact.org
0203 9678368

Please use the subject heading:

“Complaint – Professional Concern”

You can also raise a concern verbally by telephone. Where a concern is raised verbally, we may ask you to confirm the details in writing so that we can ensure that we have accurately understood your concerns.

7. What Information Should I Provide?

To help us investigate your complaint effectively, please provide as much relevant information as possible.

This may include:

- your name and professional role;
- your organisation;
- your contact details;
- the name or reference number of the case, where appropriate;
- the date or approximate date of the incident;
- the name of the relevant practitioner or member of staff, if known;
- a clear description of your concern;
- relevant correspondence or documentation;
- details of any action you have already taken to resolve the matter;
- the outcome you are seeking, if applicable.

Please provide only information that is necessary and relevant.

Where the complaint concerns a child or family, please take particular care not to send unnecessary personal or sensitive information by unsecured email.

8. What Happens After a Complaint Is Made?

We aim to acknowledge complaints promptly.

The complaint will normally be:

Step 1 – Acknowledged

We will confirm receipt of the complaint and, where appropriate, explain what will happen next.

Step 2 – Assessed

We will consider:

- the nature and seriousness of the concern;
- whether there are safeguarding or immediate risk issues;
- whether another process is more appropriate;
- whether the matter can be resolved informally;
- who should investigate the complaint.

Step 3 – Investigated

The investigation will be proportionate to the nature and seriousness of the concern.

This may involve:

- reviewing case records;
- reviewing reports or correspondence;
- speaking with relevant staff or practitioners;
- seeking clarification from the complainant;
- considering relevant policies, procedures or professional standards;
- obtaining independent advice where appropriate.

Step 4 – Responded to

We will provide a written response explaining, where appropriate:

- what was investigated;
- the outcome;
- what we found;
- whether the complaint was upheld, partially upheld or not upheld;
- any action we intend to take;
- any learning identified.

We will respect appropriate confidentiality when responding.

This means that we may not be able to provide information about employment, disciplinary or other confidential actions taken in relation to an individual.

9. Timescales

We aim to deal with complaints as promptly as possible.

Our target timescales are:

Stage	Target
Acknowledgement	Within 5 working days

Stage	Target
Initial assessment	Within 10 working days
Substantive response	Normally within 20 working days
Complex complaints	We will provide an explanation if more time is required

Some complaints may require additional time because of their complexity, the need to obtain information, safeguarding considerations or the involvement of external parties.

If additional time is required, we will keep the complainant informed.

10. Safeguarding and Immediate Risk Concerns

Complaints should not be used as a substitute for making an urgent safeguarding referral.

If your concern indicates that:

- a child may be at immediate risk;
- an adult may be at immediate risk;
- there is an immediate domestic abuse risk;
- there is a risk of serious harm;
- information requires urgent action by another agency;

you should follow your own organisation's safeguarding and risk-management procedures immediately.

Where appropriate, you should also contact the relevant local authority safeguarding service, police or emergency service.

You should not wait for DVACT-PAI to complete its complaints process before taking action to protect a child or adult.

Where a safeguarding concern is also raised as a complaint, we may manage the safeguarding element separately from the complaints process.

11. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

We will handle complaints sensitively and in accordance with applicable data protection and confidentiality requirements.

Information will be shared only where there is an appropriate lawful basis and where sharing is necessary and proportionate.

In cases involving children, domestic abuse or safeguarding, confidentiality may need to be balanced against the need to protect children and adults from harm.

Professionals should be aware that information provided to us may need to be considered alongside information already held within the case record.

We will not normally disclose confidential information about another person simply because a complaint has been made.

12. Complaints Involving a Member of Staff or Practitioner

If a complaint concerns an individual member of staff or practitioner, we will ensure that the complaint is considered fairly.

Where appropriate:

- the individual will be informed of the concern;
- they will have an opportunity to respond;
- the person investigating the complaint will be sufficiently independent from the matter;
- relevant professional standards and organisational policies will be considered.

Where the concern relates to professional conduct, competence, safeguarding or fitness to practise, additional procedures may apply.

If the individual is a registered professional, the matter may also need to be considered under the relevant professional regulator, professional body or DVACT-PAI's own registration or fitness-to-practise procedures, where applicable.

13. Complaints About an Assessment Being Used in Family Court Proceedings

We recognise that our assessments and reports may be relied upon within family court proceedings.

If a professional has a concern about the content of an assessment or report, they should raise the concern with us as soon as possible.

However, the complaints process does not replace the court's own procedures.

We will not seek to interfere with judicial decision-making or attempt to influence the outcome of court proceedings.

Where appropriate, we will:

- clarify factual matters;
- correct genuine factual errors;
- explain our assessment methodology;
- consider relevant additional information;
- review concerns about professional practice;
- identify any appropriate amendments or actions.

We will maintain the independence and professional integrity of assessments.

14. Can I Make a Complaint About Confidential Information?

Yes.

If you believe that confidential or personal information has:

- been disclosed inappropriately;
- been sent to the wrong person;
- been accessed without appropriate authorisation;
- been stored or handled inappropriately;
- not been shared when you believe it was necessary to protect a child or adult;

please raise the concern promptly.

Data protection or information governance concerns may be managed separately from the general complaints process where appropriate.

15. Will Making a Complaint Affect Future Referrals?

No.

We want professionals to feel able to raise legitimate concerns without fear that doing so will adversely affect future referrals or professional relationships.

A complaint will not, in itself, result in a professional, organisation or family being treated less favourably.

We expect all complaints to be raised respectfully and in good faith.

We also recognise that professionals have a responsibility to raise concerns where they believe there may be a risk to a child, adult or the integrity of a service.

16. What If I Am Not Satisfied With the Response?

If you remain dissatisfied, you may request that the complaint is reviewed.

Your request should explain:

- which aspects of the response you remain dissatisfied with;
- why you believe the response was inadequate;
- any additional relevant information;
- what you would like to happen.

Requests for review should normally be made within 20 working days of receiving the response.

The review will, where reasonably practicable, be undertaken by someone who was not directly responsible for the original investigation.

The review may:

- confirm the original outcome;
 - amend the outcome;
 - identify additional actions;
 - recommend further investigation;
 - identify learning or service improvements.
-

17. Compliments and Positive Feedback

We also welcome compliments and positive feedback.

Professionals may wish to tell us when:

- a practitioner has provided an excellent service;
- an assessment has been particularly helpful;
- communication has been effective;
- a programme has supported positive change;
- our service has helped a child or family;

- a member of staff has demonstrated professionalism or compassion;
- a colleague has gone above and beyond expectations.

Positive feedback is valuable to our organisation and to our staff.

With permission, we may use anonymised feedback to:

- recognise staff contributions;
- improve morale;
- demonstrate the impact of our service;
- identify good practice;
- inform training and development;
- support quality assurance and service improvement.

We will not publish identifiable information about a child, parent or family without an appropriate lawful basis and, where required, consent.

18. How to Give a Compliment

Compliments can be sent to:

Barbara Newman Compliments and Feedback Lead
DVACT-PAI
info.pai@dvact.org
0203 9678368

You can simply tell us:

- what happened;
- who was involved;
- why you found the service helpful;
- the difference it made.

You do not need to provide a lengthy written statement.

19. What We Do With Complaints and Compliments

Complaints and compliments are an important part of our quality assurance arrangements.

We will look for themes and trends rather than considering each complaint in isolation.

Information may be used to identify:

- recurring concerns;
- training needs;
- improvements to assessment processes;
- improvements to communication;
- safeguarding learning;
- policy or procedural changes;
- good practice;
- opportunities to improve services for children and families.

Where appropriate, learning will be reported to senior management and/or the organisation's governance arrangements.

Personal information will be handled appropriately when complaints and compliments are reviewed for learning purposes.

20. Our Commitment to Professionals

We recognise that our organisation is one part of a wider network of professionals working to support children and families.

We therefore aim to:

- listen to concerns;
- respond respectfully;
- investigate complaints fairly;
- communicate clearly;
- protect confidentiality;
- act promptly where safeguarding concerns arise;
- maintain professional independence;
- acknowledge mistakes where they occur;
- learn from complaints;
- recognise good practice;
- work constructively with referring professionals.

We welcome appropriate professional challenge because constructive challenge can improve decision-making and ultimately contribute to better outcomes for children and families.

21. Professional Complaints and Feedback Contact

Complaints Lead:

Claire Verney

Email:

claireverney.pai@dvact.org

Telephone:

0203 9678368

Safeguarding contact:

Tracey Boylan – traceyboylan.pai@dvact.org

Emergency:

For an immediate risk of serious harm, contact the appropriate emergency or safeguarding service without delay.

Quick Guide for Professionals

I have a concern about an assessment

Contact the practitioner or organisation promptly and identify the specific concern.

I believe there is a safeguarding concern

Follow your own safeguarding procedures immediately. Do not wait for the complaints process.

I am concerned about professional conduct

Raise the concern with the Complaints Lead so that it can be considered under the appropriate process.

I am unhappy with the service

Make a complaint in writing using the contact details above.

I want to recognise good practice

Send us a compliment or positive feedback.

I am unhappy with the response

Request a review, explaining the aspects of the response with which you remain dissatisfied.
