

Families First Complaints Policy and Procedure**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Families First is committed to providing the best possible services to children, young people, their parents and carers and our community.
- 1.2 Should someone be unhappy with the service they have received, the information they have received or the actions of someone representing Families First, they have a right to address their concerns and for those concerns to be heard.
- 1.3 Families First would encourage individuals to raise the issue informally, in the first instance, perhaps with a member of staff they have most contact with, to see if the matter can be resolved quickly and effectively.
- 1.4 If an informal resolution cannot be reached, then an individual has the right to make a complaint.
- 1.5 A complaints form can be obtained from the Families First offices, mailed out, or obtained electronically via our website.
- 1.6 All completed forms should be returned to the address on the bottom of the form.
- 1.7 Alternatively, a letter would be acceptable; please clearly indicate that the letter is in relation to a complaint.
- 1.8 Families First will ensure that this policy and procedure (see Appendix A for the flow chart) is accessible to staff, volunteers, stakeholders and service users. This information will be made available through the main office and via our website.
- 1.9 All staff and volunteers will be informed of this policy during their induction to ensure they can share this knowledge should the need arise.
- 1.10 The complaints procedure is not limited to the children and their families (or their advocates) that we work with but could extend to external agencies acting in the interests of the children and their families.
- 1.11 Families First would encourage the individual(s) to bring a friend or relative to support them in their discussions, if it would help.
- 1.12 All completed forms should be returned to the address on the bottom of the form.
- 1.13 Alternatively, a letter would be acceptable; please clearly indicate that the letter is in relation to a complaint.

2. Guiding principles

- 2.1 Families First value complaints and use the information from them to help us improve our services.
- 2.2 Our core values are used in our complaints handling process, such as:
 - Acknowledging that everyone has a basic right to be heard.
 - Listening to others.
 - Respecting others.
 - Valuing others.
- 2.3 No one will suffer any detrimental effect by making a complaint.
- 2.4 It will be a disciplinary offence if staff or volunteers apply undue influence in the prevention of a complaint.

- 2.5 Fairness – We will ensure that you and the person being complained about are given the opportunity to present their version of events and to provide evidence to support that position. The individual or panel handling or investigating the complaint will remain impartial.
- 2.6 Transparency – Both you and the person being complained about will be informed about how the complaint is being handled, the timescales, any extensions required and the reasons for the decision relating to the complaint outcome.
- 2.7 Efficiency - We understand that the complaints process may be stressful for both you and the person being complained about. Any complaint will therefore be dealt with as quickly as possible and in line with Families First complaints handling procedure timescales.

3. **Right to privacy**

- 3.1 Families First have comprehensive **Data Protection** and **Confidentiality Policies** that outline a person's right to privacy, confidentiality and when we would break that confidence.
- 3.2 Confidentiality and trust is important in the complaints process. Your wishes in respect of confidentiality will be respected and handled in a sensitive manner e.g. we will limit disclosure to staff members who need to know of the complaint.
- 3.3 If we feel, as an organisation, that lessons can be learned from the complaint, we will ask for express permission from you before using any detail of the complaint to meet the future training needs of staff and volunteers.
- 3.4 All records and notes pertaining to a complaint will be destroyed alongside the staff member and service user's files 7 years after they have left (refer to Families First Retention of Records table, appendix A in Families First Data Protection policy, unless we have a legal reason to keep it for longer).
- 3.5 The duty of confidentiality in certain circumstances may be limited by Families First's legal and regulatory obligations.

4. **Stage 1**

- 4.1 The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days and a nominated Manager will carry out a full investigation into the circumstances surrounding the complaint.
- 4.2 The target time for responding in full to a complaint is 20 working days.
- 4.3 Should the complaint be more complicated a delay may be unavoidable; if this is the case, this will be explained fully to you.
- 4.4 If the complaint is upheld, Families First will issue a full apology and explain any further actions that have been taken to resolve the situation.
- 4.5 Families First aim to achieve full resolution at the earliest possible stage.
- 4.6 The initial response will inform you of your right to ask for a review should you not be satisfied with the outcome of stage 1; details of how to do this will be provided.
- 4.7 If the complaint is regarding a Families First CEO, you should go directly to stage 2.

5. Stage 2 reviewed under the direction of the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees

- 5.1** Should you feel the issue has not been fully resolved, a further request for a review will be conducted under the direction of the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees.
- 5.2** The Chairperson will ensure that the process has been carried out properly and will check that the fundamental issues have been investigated fully.
- 5.3** The Chairperson will check that the fundamental point of the complaint has been addressed and look at any outstanding issues raised by you.
- 5.4** The Chairperson will acknowledge your request for a review of your complaint within 5 working days.
- 5.5** The outcome of the review will be sent to you within 20 working days.
- 5.6** The review will provide a full response, which will contain sufficient information to show that the complaint has been fully investigated, with an apology if appropriate.
- 5.7** Information will be given for a further review, if needed.

6. Stage 3 reviewed by an Independent Adjudicator

- 6.1** You are entitled to go to an independent person when:
 - All stages of Families First complaints procedure have been exhausted.
 - You are not happy with the outcome.
- 6.2** This person is called an Independent Adjudicator; Families First would recommend their Fife Council Link Officer.
- 6.3** A request for a stage 3 review should be made within 1 month of receiving the outcome of the stage 2 review.
- 6.4** It will become more difficult to constructively resolve the issue if the gap between the original complaint and the review is too long.
- 6.5** Requests made outside of this period will be considered if there are extenuating circumstances.
- 6.6** The Independent Adjudicator will conduct a review of the investigation to ensure:
 - The investigation has been conducted in line with the stated procedure.
 - The investigation has been handled fairly.
 - The Adjudicator will not comment on the substance of a complaint.
- 6.7** Should the Adjudicator find that the stated procedure was not followed or that the matter has not been handled fairly, the Adjudicator will specify why and may give directions for further actions to be taken.
- 6.8** The decision of the Independent Adjudicator is final.

7. Policy review

- 7.1** Oversight of this policy remains with Families First CEO and Office Manager who will notify the Board of Trustees of any updates or changes.

- 7.2** Review of this policy will take place every 2 years or sooner if there are changes to local guidelines or legislation. Following an incident, Families First learning will be incorporated.

APPENDIX A
Families First Complaints Procedure Flow Chart

Can the complaint be resolved informally?	
No	Yes
Stage 1 Families First nominated Manager	No further action required
Complaint acknowledged within 5 days, with a view to a full response within 20 days	
If the complaint is against a Manager go to stage 2	
Is the Complaint resolved?	
No	Yes
	No further action required
Stage 2 Representative of the Board	
Complaint acknowledged within 5 days, with a view to a full response within 20 days	
Is the Complaint resolved?	
No	Yes
	No further action required
Stage 3 Final Process Independent Adjudicator	
Complaint acknowledged within 5 days, with a view to a full response within 20 days	
Adjudicator decision followed	Families First decision upheld
Families First decision disputed – Families First to follow recommendations of Adjudicator	No further action required