

Compliments and Complaints Policy and Procedures

Little Hiccups recognises that at times things can and do go wrong. The Trustees believe that it is in everyone's best interest to resolve complaints and concerns at the earliest possible stage.

This policy is intended to cover all compliments and complaints for Little Hiccups regardless of whether the compliment or complaint is received from Little Hiccups families, from Little Hiccups Trustees or volunteers or from other individuals.

Little Hiccups expresses the difference between a concern and a complaint as: A concern is defined as "an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought". Little Hiccups will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication as far as possible. A complaint is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action". Little Hiccups intends to resolve complaints informally where possible, at the earliest possible stage.

Complaints

This policy does not cover complaints procedures relating to:

- Safeguarding matters
- Whistle-blowing

Please see our separate policies for procedures relating to these kinds of complaints.

Key Stages of Complaints

There are THREE key stages of this Complaints Policy:

Stage One - An Informal discussion

Stage Two – The Complaint is formally investigated by a Trustee unrelated to the incident

Stage Three – Complaint heard by a Complaint Appeals Panel

Overarching Principles

When responding to complaints, we aim to:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not possible, formal procedures will be followed.
- Ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the website and in



Little Hiccups, c/o The Barrowbys, 170 Barrowby Lane, Garforth, Leeds LS25 1NG

Tel: **07831 230741** Email: info@littlehiccups.co.uk Web: www.littlehiccups.co.uk

Registered Charity No: 1170147 Company Limited by Guarantee No: 9692276

paper format if requested. The policy aims to be simple to understand and use.

- Have Trustees who will be impartial and non-adversarial when handling complaints.
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by an independent person or panel, where necessary
- Allow swift handling within established time-limits for action and keep people informed of the progress
- Where possible, respect complainants' desire for confidentiality
- Treat complainants with respect
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process
- Little Hiccups will aim to give the complainant the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full
- Provide information to the Trustees so that services can be improved
- Deal with all complaints fairly, providing a high quality of service to those who complain. Where a complainant acts in an unreasonable fashion, we have a procedure for managing unreasonable complaints (see Appendix A).

Investigating the Complaint

At each stage, the person dealing with the complaint should ensure that they:

- Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- Meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary) ;
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right ;
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;
- Conduct the interview with an open mind
- Little Hiccups expects that complaints will be made as soon as possible after an incident arises and no later than 1 month afterwards. We will consider exceptions to this time frame in circumstances where there were valid reasons for not making a complaint at that time and the complaint can still be investigated in a fair manner for all involved.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage, the person dealing with the complaint should consider ways to resolve the complaint. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the event complained or will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- an undertaking to review Little Hiccups policies in light of the complaint.

Monitoring Complaints

Little Hiccups will monitor the level and nature of formal complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. Procedures for reporting will not name individuals.

Stage One: An Informal Discussion

It is the experience of Little Hiccups that the vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally to the full satisfaction of those who raise them. There are many occasions where



concerns can be resolved quickly, providing the complainant with the benefit of an immediate response, and avoiding the need to submit a formal complaint. Concerns may be raised to any member of the Trustees, depending on the type of issue to be discussed. The Trustees have the overall legal responsibility for a charity and full information about who these are can be found on our website. Complaints may be made in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the complainant is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the address or email on the website.

Little Hiccups will acknowledge informal complaints within 5 working days, and investigate and provide a response within 10 working days.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the discussion or if the complaint is not resolved informally, it will be escalated to a formal complaint. Refer to Stage Two.

Where the informal complaint is made to a volunteer the volunteer must refer the complainant to the appropriate member of Trustees. Volunteers must not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure

Stage Two - Formal

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage One of this policy and would like the complaint to be formally investigated, the complainant must put their complaint in writing or, if the complaint has previously submitted a written request, they may now request to proceed to stage two of the process.

The written complaint must then be handed to a Trustee. This letter should provide details such as relevant dates, times, and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

Following receipt of the written complaint, the Chair of Little Hiccups will nominate a member of the Trustees to be the investigating officer.

The investigating officer will acknowledge the complaint in writing within 5 working days.

The investigating officer will speak to the necessary individuals; interview witnesses and/or take statements from those involved. This could take up to 10 working days.

If the complaint centres on another Little Hiccups family, the family may also be interviewed.

Written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation will be kept. Once the facts have been established, the Chair, Treasurer or Secretary of Little Hiccups, where appropriate, will arrange to meet the complainant to discuss the outcome of the investigation. This meeting will be held within 20 working days from the date the formal written complaint was received. The complainant may be accompanied at the meeting by a friend, relative or representative. The complainant should inform Little Hiccups of the identity of their companion in advance.

In certain circumstances, Little Hiccups may need to refuse a request for a particular individual to attend any such meeting – for example, if there is a conflict of interest. If this is the case, Little Hiccups will notify the complainant as soon as they are aware, so that the complainant has the opportunity to arrange alternative accompaniment.

A letter outlining the outcomes of the investigation will be sent to the complainant within 5 working days of the meeting. The letter will include details of how to escalate the complaint to Stage Three if



the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage Two.

If the complaint is against the Chair of Little Hiccups, Stage Two will be carried out by the Secretary or Treasurer.

Stage Three: Complaints Appeal Panel

Complaints only rarely reach this level, where the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint at the second, formal, stage.

The aim of a panel hearing is to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between Little Hiccups and the complainant.

Anyone wishing to escalate a complaint to this stage must write to the Chair of Little Hiccups. The letter must explain why the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage Two. This needs to be within 25 working days of receiving the outcome letter.

The Chair will set up a hearing within 10 working days of receiving the letter and inform the complainant of this in writing. All parties will be given at least five working days' notice of a hearing.

It is important that any complaint hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. The panel will be appointed by or on behalf of Little Hiccups and must consist of at least 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least 1 panel member must be independent of the Trustees and running of Little Hiccups. The panel cannot be made up solely of Trustees or volunteers, as they are not independent of the management and running of Little Hiccups.

The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

The complainant must have reasonable notice of the date of the review panel; however, the review panel reserves the right to convene at their convenience rather than that of the complainant. At the review panel meeting, the complainant and representatives from Little Hiccups, as appropriate, will be present. Each will have an opportunity to set out written or oral submissions prior to the meeting.

The complainant must be allowed to attend the panel hearing and be accompanied if they wish.

At the meeting, each individual will have the opportunity to give statements and present their evidence, and witnesses will be called, as appropriate, to present their evidence.

The panel, the complainant and Little Hiccups representative(s) will be given the chance to ask and reply to questions. Once the complainant and Little Hiccups representative(s) have presented their cases, they will be asked to leave and evidence will then be considered.

The panel must then put together its findings and recommendations from the case. The panel will also provide a copy of the findings and recommendations to the complainant and, where relevant, the individual who is the subject of the complaint, and make a copy available for inspection by the Chair of Little Hiccups.

The hearing will allow for:

- The complainant to explain their complaint.
- For the Trustee or other person involved in handling the complaint at Stage Two, to explain Little Hiccups response.
- The complainant and the Trustee or other person involved in handling the complaint at Stage Two to question each other.
- For members of the hearing panel to also ask questions.
- Any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to the approval of the Chair of the panel)



- and all parties having the right to question all the witnesses.
- Final statements by both the complainant and the Trustee or other person involved in handling the complaint at Stage Two.

Following the hearing the complaint panel will consider the complaint and will send their written decision to both parties within 15 working days.

Closure of Complaints

Very occasionally, Little Hiccups may feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.

- Little Hiccups will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of "agreeing to disagree".
- If a complainant persists in making representations regarding the complaint, it can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to run Little Hiccups.
- For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint and the complaint has exhausted our official process.

Record Keeping

Little Hiccups will record the progress of all complaints, including information about actions taken at all stages, the stage at which the complaint was resolved, the final outcome and action taken by Little Hiccups as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld). The records will also include copies of letters and emails, and notes relating to meetings and phone calls.

This material will be treated as confidential and held centrally, and will be viewed only by those involved in investigating the complaint or on the review panel.

This is except where the secretary of state (or someone acting on their behalf) or the complainant requests access to records of a complaint through a freedom of information (FOI) request or under the terms of the Data Protection Bill.

Records of complaints will be kept for a minimum of 6 years.

Learning Lessons

The Little Hiccups Trustees will review any underlying issues raised by complaints where appropriate, and respecting confidentiality, determine whether there are any improvements that Little Hiccups can make to its procedures or practice to help prevent similar events in the future.

Compliments and Suggestions

Little Hiccups welcomes compliments and suggestions and recognise their importance in celebrating and recognising the success of our service and opportunities for improvement. We will engage with the families to support service development and improvement. We will share feedback with our volunteers. Compliments may be made in person or by letter, telephone or email. If the individual is unclear who to contact or how to contact them, they should contact the address or email on the website.



Appendix A: Little Hiccups Policy for Unreasonable Complainants

Introduction

Little Hiccups is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. However, we do not expect our Trustees or volunteers to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Little Hiccups defines unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with Little Hiccups would cause significant disruption to the safe and effective operation of Little Hiccups, harass or threaten any member of Little Hiccups, or engage in vexatious complaints by seeking to re-open matters that have already been the subject of a concluded complaints procedure.

Where a complainant acts in an unreasonable fashion, the Chair of Trustees may at any time inform the complainant that the complaints procedure has been exhausted and has come to an end by reason of the conduct of the complainant.

Unreasonable Complaints

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:-

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about Trustees who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where Little Hiccups complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on Little Hiccups time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint acts in a manner which is:

- malicious;
- aggressive;
- threatening, intimidating or violent;
- made using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- made knowing the complaint to be false;



- made using falsified information;
- otherwise made using conduct which is intended to intimidate, harass or is otherwise similarly inappropriate.

Communications

Whenever possible, the Chair of Trustees will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' determination. If the behaviour continues the Chair of Trustees will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it.

For complainants who excessively contact Little Hiccups, causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Little Hiccups.

Policy agreed by Trustees on:

Signed by Chairperson:

To be reviewed:



Amendments

| Date | Amendment Made | By whom |
|------------|---|---------|
| 19/11/2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- title renamed to include Compliments- 1st paragraph, says 'concerns and concerns'- changed to 'complaints and concerns'- Added section on receiving compliments- Clarified who a Trustee is | MWP |
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