

How to complain...

about children's social services in England

We know from our work on the LEaP Project that parents sometimes face problems in getting the right social care support for their disabled children. So what can you do if you're not happy? Make a complaint. Use this guide to find out more.

Where do I start?

-  Speak to the social worker or team manager to explain why you're unhappy with the service
-  Be clear about the problem and what it would take to put things right.
-  They may be able to sort things out informally, but don't wait too long – if they can't resolve the problem quickly, make a formal complaint in writing, using the council's complaints procedure

What is the complaints procedure?

The law says that every council in England must follow a special three stage procedure to deal with complaints about children's social care. The council will have other procedures for different types of complaints, so make sure you're using the children's social care procedure.

There are special rules about what happens and how long it should take:

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
How do I make a complaint?	Contact the complaints team in children's services by email or letter and tell them about your complaint. (Ask your social worker for contact details or check the council's website).	Write to the complaints team and tell them you want to move on to stage 2. You'll need to explain why you're not happy with the stage 1 response.	Write to the complaints team – explain why you're not satisfied with the stage 2 response and tell them that you want to move on to stage 3.
What happens?	The team responsible for delivering the service should try and resolve your complaint.	The council has to appoint an investigating officer to look into the complaint and write a report, as well as an 'independent person' (who isn't a council employee) to oversee the investigation. The council will then consider the report and tell you whether it agrees with it.	The council has to arrange for a review panel of 3 independent people to look at your complaint and make recommendations. You'll be invited to speak at the Panel's meeting (but you don't have to).
How long will it last?	The council has to respond within 10 working days (but they can extend this by a further 10 working days in more complex cases).	You should receive a response from the council within 25 working days, although this can be extended to a maximum of 65 working days.	The Panel must meet within 30 working days of your request. The Panel will send its report to you and the council within 5 working days of the meeting and the council then has 15 working days to tell you whether it agrees with the Panel or not.

What if I'm still not happy..?

You can make a complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (www.lgo.org.uk) if you're not satisfied with the council's response to your complaint.

If the council doesn't stick to the timescales mentioned above or refuses to move your complaint to the next stage, contact the Ombudsman.

Where can I get more information?

Check your local council's website or ask for a copy of its complaints procedure.

Read the Government's guidance for councils on dealing with complaints called "Getting the best from complaints":

www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-getting-the-best-from-complaints

Have a look at the Ombudsman's factsheet about the complaints procedure:

www.lgo.org.uk/make-a-complaint/fact-sheets/social-care/the-children-act-1989-complaints-procedure