



First Steps Family Mediation

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Effective Date: 10TH September 2025

Review Date: 10th September 2026

1. Our Commitment

First Steps Family Mediation is committed to providing a high-quality, professional and ethical mediation service. We welcome feedback, including comments, compliments and complaints, as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.

We recognise that mediation can be an emotionally challenging process. All concerns will be treated seriously, sensitively and fairly.

This policy complies with the requirements of the Family Mediation Council (FMC), the Family Mediation Association (FMA), and the Family Mediation Standards Board (FMSB).

2. What Is a Complaint?

A complaint is defined as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction, whether written or verbal, about the service provided by First Steps Family Mediation.”

This may relate to: - Professional conduct - Service delivery - Communication - Delay - Fees - Any other aspect of the mediation service

All complaints, whether informal or formal, will be recorded and handled in accordance with this policy.

3. How to Make a Complaint

Complaints may be made: - By email - In writing - By telephone

Clients are encouraged to raise concerns as soon as possible so that they can be addressed promptly.

A copy of this Complaints Policy is: - Provided to all clients at the outset of mediation; and - Available on request and via our website (where applicable).

4. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Where appropriate, we will first seek to resolve concerns informally.

- Complaints will be acknowledged within **five (5) working days** of receipt.
- We will explain how the complaint will be handled and when the complainant can expect further contact.
- Where suitable, we may contact the complainant by telephone to attempt early resolution.

If the complaint is not resolved informally within 14 days, the complainant will be invited to confirm the complaint in writing so that it can proceed to the formal stage.

5. Stage 2 – Formal Complaint (Internal Review)

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, it becomes a formal complaint.

- A full written response will normally be provided within **21 working days** of acknowledgement, or as soon as reasonably practicable.
- The response will address the issues raised, explain findings, and outline any action proposed.

If mediation is ongoing, it may be suspended pending resolution of the complaint. The other party will be informed that a complaint has been made, but no details will be disclosed unless required and appropriate.

All formal complaints will be notified to our Professional Practice Consultant (PPC).

6. Stage 3 – Professional Practice Consultant (PPC) Review

Where a complaint is not resolved at Stage 2, or where required under FMC/FMA requirements, full details of the complaint and our response will be sent to our Professional Practice Consultant (PPC).

The PPC may: - Attempt informal resolution; or - Conduct a formal review of the complaint.

Where a formal review is undertaken: - Relevant files and records (as permitted under the Agreement to Mediate) may be shared with the PPC. - The PPC will conduct an independent investigation. - Written recommendations will be provided to the complainant.

7. Stage 4 – Referral to the Family Mediation Standards Board (FMSB)

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the PPC process, they may refer the complaint to the Family Mediation Standards Board (FMSB), subject to the FMSB's eligibility criteria.

Details of how to make a complaint to the FMSB can be found at:

<https://www.familymediationcouncil.org.uk/complaints-about-mediators/>

The FMSB is independent of First Steps Family Mediation.

8. Vexatious or Abusive Complaints

All complaints will be recorded and assessed.

Where a complaint is considered to be vexatious, abusive, or outside the scope of mediation services, this will be explained clearly to the complainant in writing. The complaint will still be logged in our complaints register.

9. Confidentiality and Data Protection

First Steps Family Mediation is a registered Data Controller with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) (Registration No. ZB340075).

Complaints are handled confidentially and in accordance with our Privacy Policy and UK GDPR obligations.

Information relating to a complaint will only be shared where necessary for investigation, regulatory compliance, safeguarding obligations, or where legally required.

Where a complaint is referred to our Professional Practice Consultant (PPC) or to the Family Mediation Standards Board (FMSB), relevant parts of the mediation file may be shared for the purposes of investigation, in accordance with the Agreement to Mediate and our Privacy Policy.

Complaint records are stored securely using appropriate technical and organisational safeguards.

10. Record Keeping, Retention and Monitoring

- All complaints are recorded in a confidential Complaints Register.
- Complaint files form part of the mediation file and are retained in line with our Privacy Policy.
- Mediation files are archived once a case is closed and are normally retained for six and a half (6.5) years before secure destruction, unless a longer retention period is required for legal or regulatory reasons.
- Complaints are reviewed periodically to identify learning points and improve service quality.
- We take all reasonable steps to ensure that personal data is processed securely and only for legitimate purposes connected to the provision of mediation services.

11. Data Protection Complaints

If a complaint relates specifically to how we have handled personal data, we will investigate this under both this Complaints Policy and our Privacy Policy.

If you remain dissatisfied with our response regarding data protection matters, you have the right to raise your concern with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO):

Website: <https://www.ico.org.uk>

Helpline: 0303 123 1113

Address: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, SK9 5AF

12. Policy Review

This policy is reviewed annually or sooner if required by changes in regulation, professional standards, or data protection law.

If you have any questions about this policy or wish to exercise your data protection rights, please contact:

First Steps Family Mediation

Email: info@firststepsfamilymediation.co.uk