

The Essentials of Complaints Handling

Presented by Erin Gormican
July 14, 2022

Agenda



The Office of the Ombudsperson

Essentials of complaint handling

Communication tips for effective complaint handling

Questions

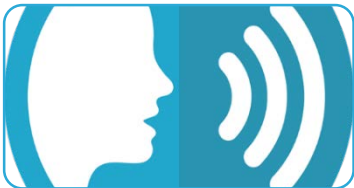
Role of the Ombudsperson



Independent and impartial oversight



Ensure fair treatment by public authorities



Support public authorities to be fair and accountable

Administrative fairness is...



Fair process

Impartial and unbiased decision maker

Opportunity to participate and be heard

Decision (reasons) explained

Fair decision

Follow rules (including legislation, bylaws, policies)

Consider individual circumstances and case

Based on complete and relevant information

Fair service

Good communication & respectful treatment

Accessible, timely and transparent

Fix errors and mistakes

Agenda



The Office of the Ombudsperson



Essentials of complaint handling



Communication tips for effective complaint handling



Questions

Why does good complaint handling matter?

Strengthen relationships

Repair weaknesses or gaps in service delivery

Ensure continuous improvement

Save time and resources

Prevent unreasonable complainant conduct

Setting the tone



Establish a culture that values complaints

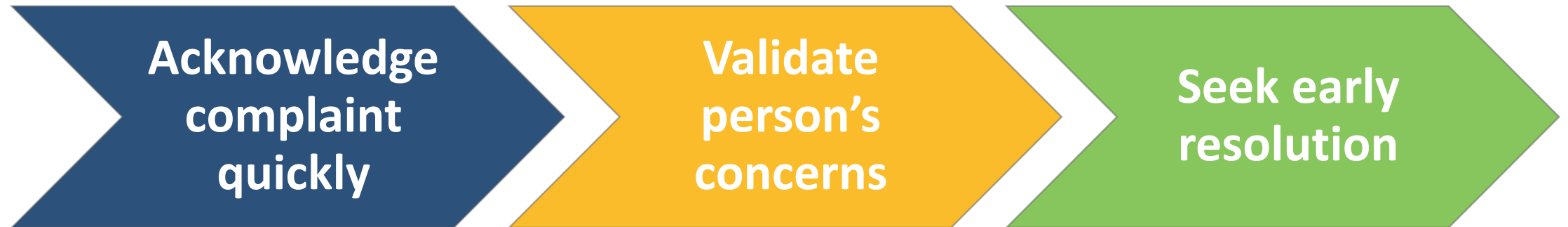


Recruit skilled staff and empower them to respond



Develop fair and accessible complaints policies and procedures

Handling point-of-service complaints: Acknowledge and seek early resolution



Handling point-of-service complaints: Conduct an initial assessment



WHO

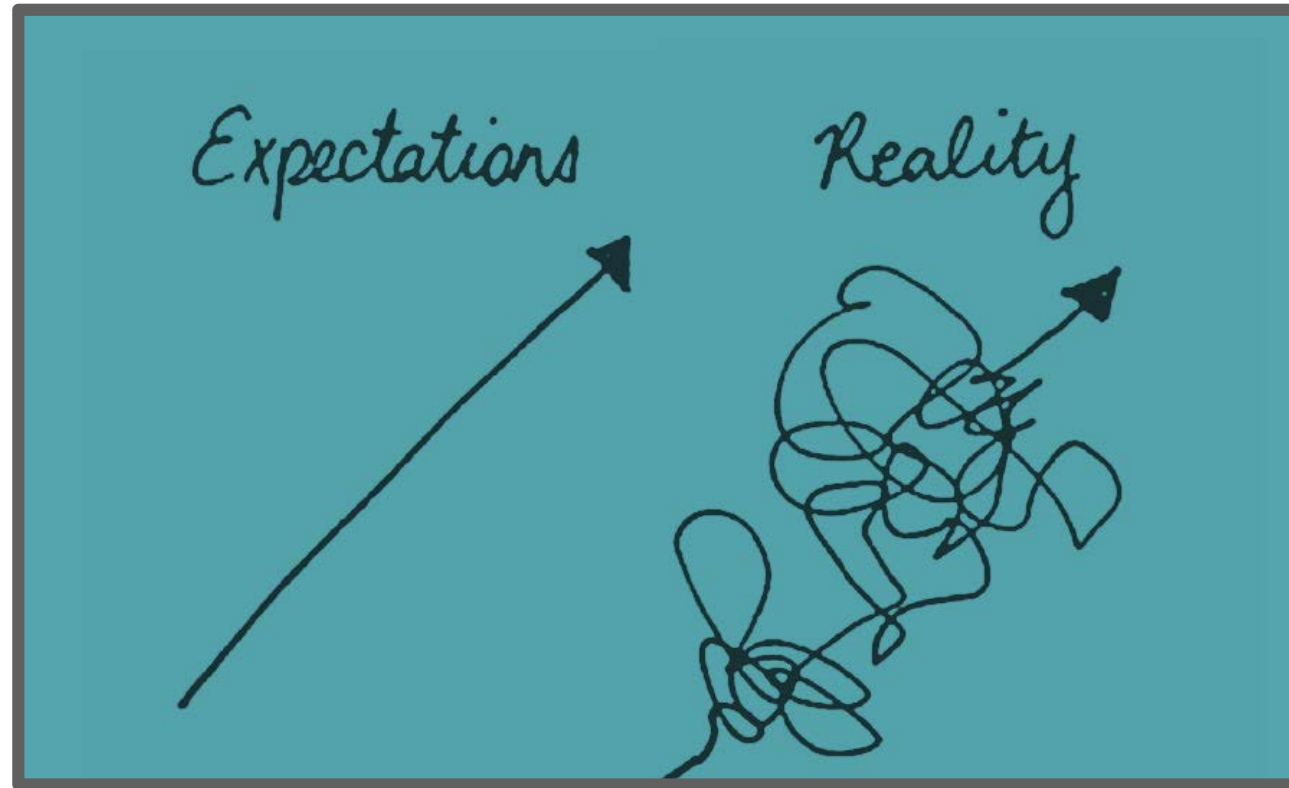


SERIOUSNESS



URGENCY

Managing expectations



Handling point-of-service complaints: Manage expectations

Your role

How their
complaint will be
dealt with

Issues you are
considering

Level of
involvement

How long
it will take

Possible
outcomes

Top three ways to resolve complaints

1. Better explanation of original decision

2. Reconsideration of original decision

3. Provide an apology

Agenda



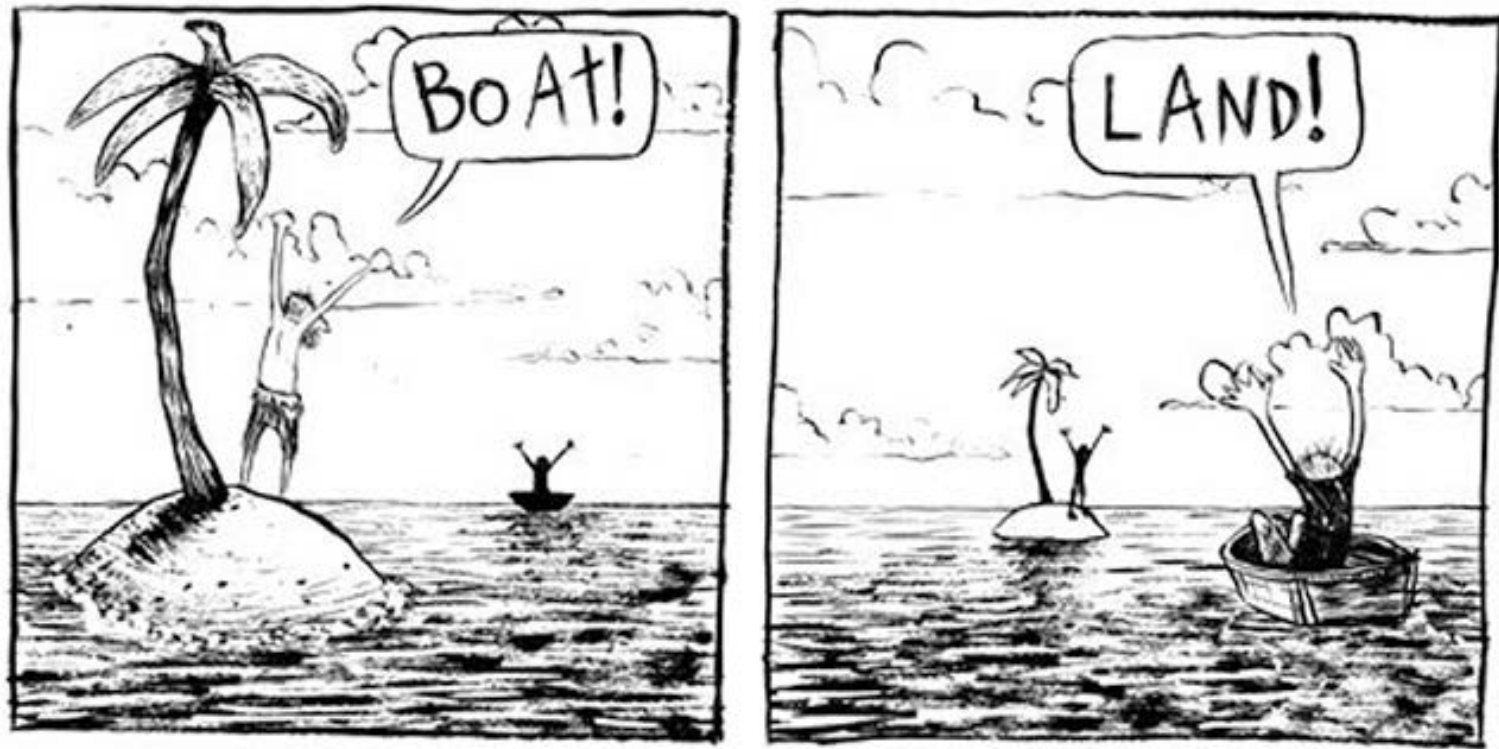
The Office of the Ombudsperson

Essentials of complaint handling

Communication tips for effective complaint handling

Questions

Different perspectives



Perspective...

Communication tips for complaint handling

Use active listening

Demonstrate empathy

Focus on the facts

Use clear, simple language

Leave space for silence

Be trauma-informed

Communication tips for complaint handling: Listen, actively

*Listen with the
intent to understand,
rather than with
the intent to respond*



Communication tips for complaint handling: Ask open-ended questions

Ask open-ended questions

- *Can you tell me everything you remember about...*
- *What happened next?*
- *What do you think could/should have happened?*
- *How would you like to see this resolved?*



Communication tips for complaint handling: Paraphrase

Paraphrase what the speaker is saying

- *It sounds like you're concerned about...*
- *If I understand you correctly, you are saying that this occurred...is that right?*
- *It sounds like the most important thing for you right now is...*



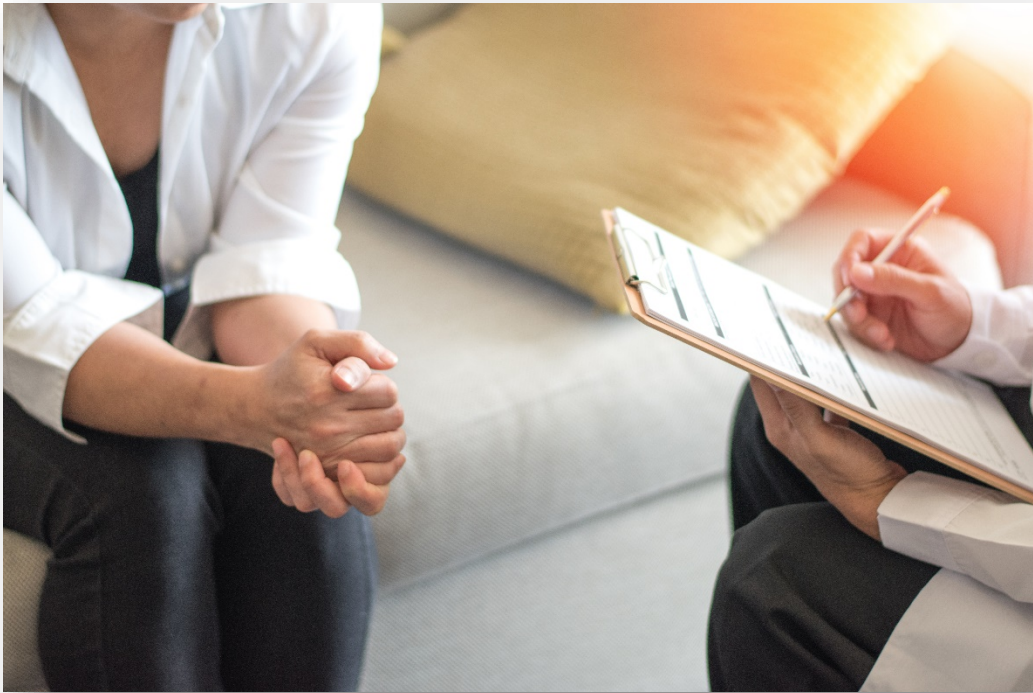
Communication tips for complaint handling: Reframing

Reframe loaded or negative terms into positive ones

- Retain basic point and feelings
- Use neutral, non-judgmental and forward-looking terms
- *I can see this has been upsetting for you and you expect a response from us right away.*



Communication tips for complaint handling: Be trauma-informed



Trauma-informed approach:
Delivering services with an understanding of the impact of trauma and seeking to avoid re-traumatizing individuals

Communication tips for complaint handling: Be trauma-informed

Exposure to trauma impacts:

- The brain structure and chemistry
- Physical and mental health
- Belief system and perceptions of world
- Coping mechanisms

Individuals may exhibit:

- Low tolerance for frustration
- Difficulty being flexible
- Difficulty problem solving

Communication tips for complaint handling: Be trauma-informed

Universal precautions

Assume others have
experienced trauma

Treat people with
unconditional respect and
understanding

Responding to challenging conduct

DESC:

DESCRIBE



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graph TD; A[DESCRIBE] --> B[EXPRESS]; B --> C[SPECIFY]; C --> D[CONSEQUENCES];
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The diagram illustrates the DESC model as a four-step process. It consists of four horizontal bars of different colors (green, dark blue, pink, and orange) arranged in a descending staircase pattern from top-left to bottom-right. Each bar contains a step name, with the first letter underlined. Downward-pointing arrows connect the right side of each bar to the left side of the next bar below it, indicating a sequential flow.

EXPRESS

SPECIFY

CONSEQUENCES

positive (+) and negative (-)

QUICK TIPS

COMPLAINTS PROCESS SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST



The following checklist provides a quick reference guide for organizations to conduct a self-assessment of their current complaint process and identify areas for improvement. By following this checklist and the key principles featured in our full [Complaint Handling Guide](#), organizations can build the framework for an effective complaint management system that will assist them in responding well to concerns from service users.

1. Do we foster an organizational culture that welcomes complaints from service users?

Do the leaders of our organization view complaints as a valuable source of feedback and an opportunity for improvement? ☐

Do we make it easy for people to raise concerns about our organization? ☐

Does our organization take action on issues identified through the complaints we receive from service users? ☐

Do we provide support to staff who are the subject of a complaint and inform them that the focus is on learning from the experience, and not on apportioning blame? ☐

2. Do we have an adequate complaints policy and procedure for our organization?

Does our complaint policy include a definition of a 'complaint'? ☐

Do we have a three-tiered complaint process that encourages early resolution of complaints? ☐

Do we provide clear guidance to staff on how to acknowledge and respond to a complaint, including standard timelines for response? ☐

Are there clear procedures that direct staff on what kinds of complaints can be resolved informally at point-of-service, and what complaints require escalation/investigation? ☐

Do our procedures describe our organization's standards for investigating complaints? ☐

COMPLAINT HANDLING GUIDE

Setting up Effective Complaint Resolution Systems in Public Organizations



Special Report No. 46 | December 2020
to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

QUICK TIPS

MODEL COMPLAINTS POLICY



This model complaints policy is intended to provide general guidance to assist public organizations in developing an effective complaints resolution process. It offers suggestions for policy language and a general template for complaints handling; however, it is not intended to be a comprehensive guide. Wording used in the document should be tailored to suit the organization's unique service delivery model and complaints handling procedures and must be compliant with other applicable agency rules and legal requirements. While it is important for organizations to develop standard procedures for complaint handling, they must also demonstrate flexibility and consider individual needs and circumstances when responding to complaints from service users. Please visit www.bcombudsperson.ca for our full Complaint Handling Guide.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure <Name of Agency> provides a fair, effective and transparent response to complaints and concerns raised by our service users. This policy sets out the procedures for receiving, reviewing, recording and responding to complaints about our service.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

<Name of Agency> is committed to high standards of practice in our work. We value feedback and complaints from our service users and continuously strive to improve our services. Our complaints process is guided by the following principles:

ACCESSIBLE	<Name of Agency>'s complaints process is publicly available on our website, and service users are informed of their right to complain about our organization. Complaints are accepted in a variety of ways (i.e., webform, phone, mail, email and in-person).
FAIR	All complaints will be handled in a manner that is impartial and fair. Our process provides the opportunity for service users to submit relevant information and have an opportunity to be heard before the review of the complaint is finalized. We thoroughly and objectively review the complaints we receive, and are committed to keeping people informed of the progress of their complaint.
PERSON-FOCUSED	We recognize that service users have different needs, and each person has their own unique history that they bring to the interaction with our agency. We commit to listen to our service users' concerns, treat them with dignity and respect, and maintain confidentiality throughout the complaints process.
RESPONSIVE	We will respond to complaints within XX business days, and will seek to resolve the complaint at the earliest opportunity. Complaints that cannot be resolved at first contact, or those that raise more serious concerns about our organization, will be forwarded for further review/investigation within XX business days. <Name of Agency> is committed to these time frames and will inform our service users of the progress of their complaint and reasons for any delay in the complaint resolution process.

<Other options for Guiding Principles: accountable, transparent, objective, efficient, confidential, continuous improvement, etc.>

<https://bcombudsperson.ca/fairness-education-resources/fairness-resources/>

Thank you

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