



Acorn Autism Specialists

Diagnosis | Independence | Well-being

Complaints Policy & Procedure

Policy & Procedure

Document reference	AAS-POL-013
Version	v2026.1
Issue / review date	April 2026
Next scheduled review	April 2027
Policy lead	Clinical Director
Statutory / regulatory basis	HSCA 2008 Regs 2014 Reg 16; NHS & Community Care Act 1990
Legal status	MANDATORY – Reg 16 HSCA 2008 Regs 2014 (Receiving & acting on complaints)

Approved by the Directors of Acorn Autism Specialists

Legislative & regulatory framework

- Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014 – Regulation 16
- Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009
- Equality Act 2010 – reasonable adjustments to the complaints process
- UK GDPR / DPA 2018 – information sharing & records
- Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Complaints Standards Framework
- NHS Patient Safety Incident Response Framework (PSIRF) – good-practice reference

1 Purpose

Acorn Autism Specialists is committed to handling concerns and complaints openly, fairly and promptly. We use every complaint as an opportunity to improve.

2 Scope

This policy applies to any expression of dissatisfaction from a client, family member, referrer, advocate or member of the public about our service or conduct.

3 Our commitments

- You will not be disadvantaged for complaining.
- We will be open, transparent and honest (duty of candour).
- We will acknowledge your complaint within 3 working days.
- We will offer a discussion and agree how to respond.
- We will aim to give a final written response within 20 working days; longer only with agreement.
- Reasonable adjustments are available at every stage.

4 How to complain

- Speak to any member of staff, who will try to resolve your concern immediately.
- Email info@acorn-autism.co.uk, or write to: Complaints Lead, Acorn Autism Specialists, Suite A Bridgefoot Studios, Maldon Road, Kelvedon, Essex CO5 9BE.
- Telephone 01376 402284 during office hours.

5 Stage 1 – Local Resolution

1. Acknowledge within 3 working days.
2. Clinical Director reviews records, speaks with the staff involved and with the complainant.
3. A written response sets out findings, apologies where warranted, and actions.

6 Stage 2 – Independent Review

If you are not satisfied, you may ask for an independent review. We will arrange for a suitable independent clinician (not previously involved) to review the complaint and respond within a further 20 working days.

7 Escalation

- **ICO:** ico.org.uk – data-protection complaints.
- Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (NHS-funded care only).
- **HCPC, GMC, NMC, Social Work England:** for concerns about a registered professional.

8 Learning & Improvement

Themes from complaints, compliments, incidents and safeguarding concerns are reviewed quarterly and reported to the Directors. Lessons are actioned, tracked to closure and included in the Annual Quality Report.

9 Accessibility & Advocacy

We offer the complaints process in Easy Read, via email, post, phone or face-to-face, with interpretation and BSL on request. Independent advocacy is signposted (e.g., POhWER, VoiceAbility).

10 Roles & Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Clinical Director	Owens complaint-handling; Stage 1 response; quarterly themes report.
Directors	Governance oversight; ensure learning.
All staff	Listen, acknowledge and escalate concerns the same day.

11 Breach of Policy

Failure to act on complaints may breach CQC Regulation 16 and Regulation 20 (Duty of Candour).

12 Monitoring & Review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually, or sooner if legislation, regulatory guidance, or best practice changes, by the Policy Lead in conjunction with the Directors.

13 Related Documents

- Duty of Candour Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Compliments, Concerns & Complaints Log
- Accessibility Procedure

Approval & Sign-off

Approved by	Board of Directors, Acorn Autism Specialists
Date approved	April 2026
Next review	April 2027