

Dealing with a problem raised by a worker

Many problems at work can be resolved informally, for example through an informal chat.

A worker could raise a problem informally by telling their line manager or someone else at work. For example, another manager or someone in HR. It does not have to be in writing at this stage.

Take the problem seriously

If a worker raises a problem informally, you should still take it seriously.

If you do not, the problem might be raised as a [formal grievance](#) later. A formal grievance might lead to the worker making a claim to an employment tribunal if it's not resolved.

It's also important to take it seriously to help:

- keep a good working relationship with the worker
- avoid a formal grievance procedure – this can affect your organisation's reputation, take time and be difficult for everyone involved

It's good practice to:

- set up an informal chat or meeting to discuss their concerns
- agree to any request from the worker to bring someone they work with, a trade union representative or other relevant person to a meeting

It's usually up to you to agree if the worker can bring someone else to the meeting. If discrimination law applies you might have to allow someone to come with them to help remove any disadvantage.

For example, allowing a support or care worker to attend to provide support. It could be considered a [reasonable adjustment](#) if it would reduce any disadvantage a disabled person might face in raising their problem.

Solving the problem should be a two-way process so that:

- you let the worker explain the problem and any solution – for example, asking them what they would like done about it
- the worker listens to what you have to say

Keep a record

You should keep a record of how you dealt with the problem, even if it was informal.

The record should include:

- what the problem is
- what you did, such as have an informal meeting

- what you discussed in any informal chats or meetings
- any next steps agreed
- the reasons for any next steps

It's good practice to make sure next steps are clear, specific and measurable. For example, 'person A will do action B by date C, because of reason D'.

Following up

You should ask the worker if the problem is now resolved for them. If it is not, to move things forward you could:

- check any next steps have been completed
- set up more informal discussions
- find out if anything else can be done

You should remind them they can also raise the grievance formally.

If the worker raises a formal grievance

The worker might [raise the grievance formally](#) if:

- they feel raising it informally has not worked
- it's a serious issue, for example sexual assault or [whistleblowing](#)
- they do not want to resolve it informally – you can still suggest this as an option

They should raise the formal grievance:

- as soon as possible
- in writing, outlining what the problem is

If you do not follow a formal procedure, it could affect the outcome if the problem reaches an [employment tribunal](#).

Who they should raise it with

Your organisation should have a grievance policy that says who workers should raise grievances with.

If you do not have one, they should raise it to a manager. This can be either their own manager or someone else, such as an HR manager.

Using mediation

You can use mediation at any stage of the procedure. Mediation involves an independent, impartial person helping both sides to find a solution.

The mediator can be someone from inside or outside your organisation. If they're from outside your organisation, you might need to pay.

Both sides will need to agree to mediation.

[Find out more about mediation at work](#)

Further help and support

If you need help with a problem raised by a worker, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#) to talk through your options.

Acas also provides:

- [skills for line manager training](#)
- [conflict management training](#)
- [a conflict management skills online course](#)
- [tailored support for employers](#)
- [free e-learning on managing conflict](#)