

Dealing with a problem raised by an employee

Many workplace problems (often known as 'grievances') can be resolved informally, for example through a quiet chat.

An employee 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 an employee 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 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 employee
- avoid a formal grievance procedure – this can affect your business's reputation, take time and be difficult for everyone involved

It's a good idea to:

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

According to discrimination law, the employee can also bring someone for additional support (such as an interpreter or carer).

If they want to bring anyone else (such as a parent or friend), you don't have to agree.

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

- the employer lets the employee explain the problem and any solution, for example asking the employee what they would like done about it
- the employee listens to what the employer has 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 about
- what you did (such as have an informal meeting)
- what was discussed in any informal chat or meeting
- any next steps agreed
- the reasons for any next steps

It's a good idea 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 employee 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 employee raises a formal grievance

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

- they feel raising it informally has not worked
- it's a serious issue (such as 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 things reach an [employment tribunal](#).

Who they should raise it with

You should have a workplace grievance policy that says who employees should raise grievances to.

If you don't have one, they should raise it to a manager – 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 business. If they're from outside your business, you might need to pay.

Both sides will need to agree to mediation.

You can find out more about mediation in the [Acas guide on discipline and grievances at work](#).

If the employee raises a grievance during a disciplinary procedure

The employer can pause the [disciplinary procedure](#) and deal with the grievance first.

If the disciplinary and grievance cases are related, the employer can deal with both at the same time.