

Workplace Complaint Triage Checklist

An employee complaint has been raised. What next?

This checklist was written to help you determine your next steps to take upon receiving a complaint. It is designed to help employers respond confidently to complaints, identify potential risks, and determine the most appropriate course of action.

Every complaint should be assessed fairly, consistently, and in a timely manner.

Not every workplace complaint requires a formal investigation, however, keep in mind that every complaint requires attention and must be addressed appropriately.

Step 1 - Complaint Received

Verbal Complaint

- ☐ Thank the employee for bringing the matter forward.
- ☐ Listen carefully without interrupting or making assumptions.
- ☐ Ask open questions to understand the concern.
- ☐ Avoid making promises about the outcome.
- ☐ Explain that the matter will be assessed before determining next steps.
- ☐ Advise that confidentiality will be maintained where reasonably practicable but cannot always be guaranteed.
- ☐ Acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing following verbal conversation.
- ☐ Consider whether any immediate action is required to protect those involved while the complaint is being assessed.

Written Complaint

- ☐ Acknowledge receipt of the complaint.
- ☐ Thank the employee for bringing the matter to your attention.
- ☐ Advise that the complaint will be reviewed and assessed before determining the appropriate next steps.
- ☐ Read the complaint objectively without making assumptions or reaching conclusions.
- ☐ Preserve the original complaint and any supporting documents.
- ☐ Consider whether any immediate action is required to protect those involved while the complaint is being assessed.
- ☐ Advise the employee that confidentiality will be maintained where reasonably practicable but cannot always be guaranteed.
- ☐ If clarification is required, arrange a meeting with the employee to better understand the concerns raised.

Assess the Initial Risk of the Complaint

Question

	Yes	No
Is anyone at immediate risk of harm?	☐	☐
Does anyone need immediate support or protection?	☐	☐
Could this involve bullying, harassment, discrimination or sexual harassment?	☐	☐
Could workplace health and safety obligations be impacted?	☐	☐
Could the allegations amount to serious misconduct?	☐	☐
Is urgent action required to protect employee/s or the workplace?	☐	☐

If you answered "Yes" to any of the above, it's recommend that you seek independent expert advice before proceeding.

Step 3 - Understand the Complaint (from a high-level perspective)

Before deciding how to respond, ensure you understand the issue.

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- When did it occur?
- Where did it occur?
- Is this an isolated incident or an ongoing issue?
- Are there any witnesses?
- Is there any supporting evidence?
- What outcome is the employee seeking?

Step 4 - Determine the Most Appropriate Next Steps

Not every complaint requires a workplace investigation. Consider whether the issue may be resolved through:

- Coaching or guidance
- Informal discussion
- Facilitated conversation
- Mediation
- Performance management
- Formal investigation
- External investigator

Step 5 - Questions To Ask Yourself

Before making your decision, consider:

- ☐ Have I gathered enough information to decide the next step?
- ☐ Am I remaining impartial?
- ☐ Could there be a conflict of interest?
- ☐ Would an independent person be more appropriate to handle the complaint?
- ☐ Have I treated all parties fairly?
- ☐ Is my proposed response proportionate to the complaint?
- ☐ Have I considered my employer obligations?

Step 6 - Document Your Decision

Good documentation protects both your employees and your business.

Ensure that you have recorded:

- ☐ The date that the complaint was received
- ☐ Summary of allegations
- ☐ Initial risk assessment
- ☐ Decisions made, and the reasons for those decisions
- ☐ Actions taken
- ☐ Follow-up required
- ☐ Outcome communicated

Common Mistakes To Avoid

- ✗ Ignoring the complaint
- ✗ Making assumptions before hearing all sides
- ✗ Promising complete confidentiality
- ✗ Delaying action unnecessarily
- ✗ Taking sides too early
- ✗ Failing to document conversations
- ✗ Investigating issues that could have been resolved informally
- ✗ Not investigating issues that present significant legal or safety risk

Remember...

- ✗ Treat each complaint independently and don't assume this one should be treated the same as the last complaint.
- ✗ Every complaint deserves to be taken seriously
- ✗ Not every complaint requires a formal investigation
- ✗ The goal is to make fair, consistent and well-documented decisions based on the information available.

Unsure where to turn or what to do?

Now Actually partners with employers to assess workplace complaints, determine the most appropriate pathway, conduct investigations where required, and ensure businesses meet their employer obligations with confidence.

Contact us to talk through your options!

Disclaimer: This checklist is intended as general guidance only and does not constitute legal or professional advice. Workplace complaints vary significantly, and additional obligations or procedural requirements may apply depending on the circumstances. Employers should seek appropriate HR or legal advice before making decisions on complex or high-risk matters.