



**Board of Professional Conduct**

**Coping with the complaints process**

*Advice to Psychologists*

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# Board of Professional Conduct

## Coping with the complaints process

### *Advice to Psychologists*

Psychologists who find themselves the subject of a complaint may find it helpful to be reminded of the following points:

**1. The Board (BPC) has strict rules and limitations governing its behaviour.**

The BPC has a duty to investigate every complaint fully and fairly. While endeavouring to treat both complainant and psychologist fairly and with respect, and avoid causing unnecessary distress, BPC members are not in a position to offer support to either party. If your expectations of the BPC are too high or unrealistic, it will create further stress.

**2. The complaints process is inquisitorial (i.e. investigatory)**

The process for investigating complaints is inquisitorial rather than adversarial, that is, the aim is to establish the facts of a case, not to 'win' a contest. Try to keep this in mind.

**3. The process is stressful**

Having a complaint made about your professional practice or conduct is inevitably stressful. Do what you can to manage and minimise that stress. Utilise your usual stress-reducing strategies. Unless it is inappropriate for some reason, seek advice and support from supervisors and experienced colleagues.

**4. Processing a complaint takes time**

Do not expect the matter to be resolved swiftly. If you are prepared for an extended process, you may be better able to withstand the inevitable stresses this entails.

**5. Indemnity insurance**

Consult your insurers. You will need to be sure that they approve any action taken by you (including action by legal representatives).

## **6. Select legal advisers with care**

Psychologists who have allegations made about them may wish to seek legal advice. Such advice may be helpful. However, it is important to bear in mind that:

- (a) The costs of legal advice have to be borne by the psychologist or an insurer.
- (b) Legal advisers should be chosen with care. It is often in the psychologist's interests to have the case resolved as early as possible. Some lawyers may focus on procedural issues and cause hearings to be deferred. Such delays can add to the psychologist's stress.

## **7. Do what you can to facilitate the investigation**

- (a) Respond to queries promptly, and always within the time limits specified.
- (b) Address your correspondence to the correct person(s). For example, during the preliminary enquiries stage, you should write to the two people nominated to carry out the investigation, not to the Chair of the Board of Professional Conduct. If correspondence has to be re-directed, the investigation is delayed.
- (c) Mark all correspondence with the code number given to your case (e.g. 6/00). The codes are used to preserve confidentiality. Office staff and BPC members not dealing directly with a case will hear it referred to only by code, and will not know the name of anyone involved.
- (d) Try to remain focussed on the points at issue and not to introduce tangential material.