Complaints Policy

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Introduction

The Women's Liberation Collective is a Charity registered with the Charity Commission (no. 118441); we provide governance for Own My Life.

The Women's Liberation Collective are committed to ensuring that every woman who accesses the Own My Life course has a life-changing, positive experience, which aligns with our core values and principles.

We understand that sometimes things go wrong. Whilst we hope and expect that most concerns can be resolved **informally**, we recognise that some matters will require a response in accordance with this policy.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to clearly and transparently set out how concerns relating to Own My Life can be raised, and how they will be handled.

It applies to all Trustees, staff, volunteers and freelance contractors connected to Own My Life.

A copy of this policy and Own My Life Complaints form is on our website.

Related Policies and documents

- Expectations of Sisterhood
- Serious Incidents Policy
- Safeguarding Policy

Guiding principles

This policy seeks to reflect the **Six Principles of Good Complaint Handling**, as set out in the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman:

- Getting it right
- Being customer focused
- Being open and accountable
- Acting fairly and proportionately
- Putting things right
- Seeking continuous improvement

This policy is guided by our values, which underpin how we approach our work.

Woman-centred: Women and their needs are at the centre of everything we do. Our aim to prioritise women is in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 in which "sex" is a protected characteristic

Liberation: We seek to ensure that all women we reach experience equality of opportunity: we also aim to move beyond equality, and work towards a world where women are liberated from male violence and control.

Integrity: We hold ourselves to a high ethical standard, striving to act honestly, fairly and consistently and using power wisely and well.

Resistance: This resistance is both collective and individual. As an organisation we will resist the oppression of women and the ways patriarchy harms us all. Alongside this, we recognise that all women find creative ways to resist abusers. Rather than this

resistance being honoured, women are often met with scorn and blame. Our work seeks to honour and mobilise women's resistance to abuse and patriarchy.

Collaboration: We foster collaborative spaces which build sisterhood and resist competitive attitudes. We will work together with charities and other partner organisations to achieve our goals.

Expectations of Sisterhood

In 2022, we developed our Expectations of Sisterhood which can be read HERE.

Our Expectations set out the mutual relationship between Own My Life and the organisations who run Own My Life courses for women and girls.

The Expectations are relevant to:

- Organisations that run the Own My Life course.
- Individuals who attend our training.
- Individuals who go on to facilitate the Own My Life course with women.
- Women and girls who attend the Own My Life course.

If women or girls accessing the Own My Life course and/or practitioners facilitating the Own My Life course are concerned that the course is being run in a way that may breach the Expectations of Sisterhood, they are invited to contact Own My Life to ensure their concerns are properly investigated.

See HERE on **How to make a complaint about a service delivering Own My Life** for more information.

What we will consider as a complaint

We will consider the following as a complaint within the scope of this policy:

- Concerns relating to the conduct of anyone working on behalf of Own My Life (whether in a paid or voluntary capacity).
- Concerns relating to how Own My Life policies are implemented.
- Concerns related to health and safety (i.e. when our actions or inactions may have put people at risk).

We recognise that expressions of dissatisfaction with our services can progress into formal complaints if they are not addressed promptly.

We will seek to understand and resolve any concerns at the earliest opportunity once they are brought to our attention.

What we will not consider as a complaint

We will **not** consider the following as a complaint within the scope of this policy:

- Staff grievances / internal personnel matters.
- Negative feedback given as part of our training evaluation.
- Previously resolved complaints.
- Complaints made in relation to the position that Own My Life holds regarding:
    - Domestic abuse.
    - Application of the Equality Act.
    - The patriarchy and the structural systems of women's oppression
- Anonymous complaints.
- Complaints referring to third party organisations or services outside of our control.
- Any complaints not sent through our formal complaints process (e.g. comments made on social media).
- Actions taken by Own My life to improve accessibility or address inequality.

How to make a complaint about Own My Life

People can complain to us via email, our website or by post – please see **Useful Contacts** HERE.

Where possible, we encourage people to complete the **Own My Life Complaints Form,** as this will help us to understand the nature of the concerns and what outcome the complainant is hoping to see as a result of raising it.

A copy of the **Own My Life Complaints Form** can be found at the end of this policy.

What to expect if you make a complaint

We have **three stages** to our complaints policy.

Stage One

The complaint will be allocated to a nominated complaint handler (this might be a Trustee or someone else working on behalf of Own My Life) who will:

- Acknowledge the complaint (within two working days).
- Lead on all the communication.

- Determine the required investigation.
- **Provide a written outcome to the complainant (within ten working days).**

Stage Two – CEO review

If the complainant is not satisfied, they can request that their complaint is escalated to Stage Two.

The CEO may deal with this or may allocate the complaint to a complaint handler. In such cases, the investigation and any relevant communication will be led by the complaint handler.

The CEO / complaint handler will:

- Acknowledge the complaint (within two working days).
- Consult all relevant parties.
- Notify the Chair of Trustees of the complaint.
- **Provide a written outcome to the complainant (within 20 working days).**

If the matter requires extensive investigation, notice will be given to extend the timescale for response.

If the complaint concerns a Board member/s, an external third party will be recruited to conduct the investigation. Complainants will be notified of this and be able to communicate directly with the external investigator who will provide notice to extend the timescale for response.

Stage Three – Board of Trustees

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response received within Stage Two**,** they can request that their complaint is escalated to Stage Three.

This further request must be made in writing and within a period of ten working days from the formal response at Stage Two.

The Board may allocate the complaint to a complaint handler. In such cases, the investigation and any relevant communication will be led by the complaint handler.

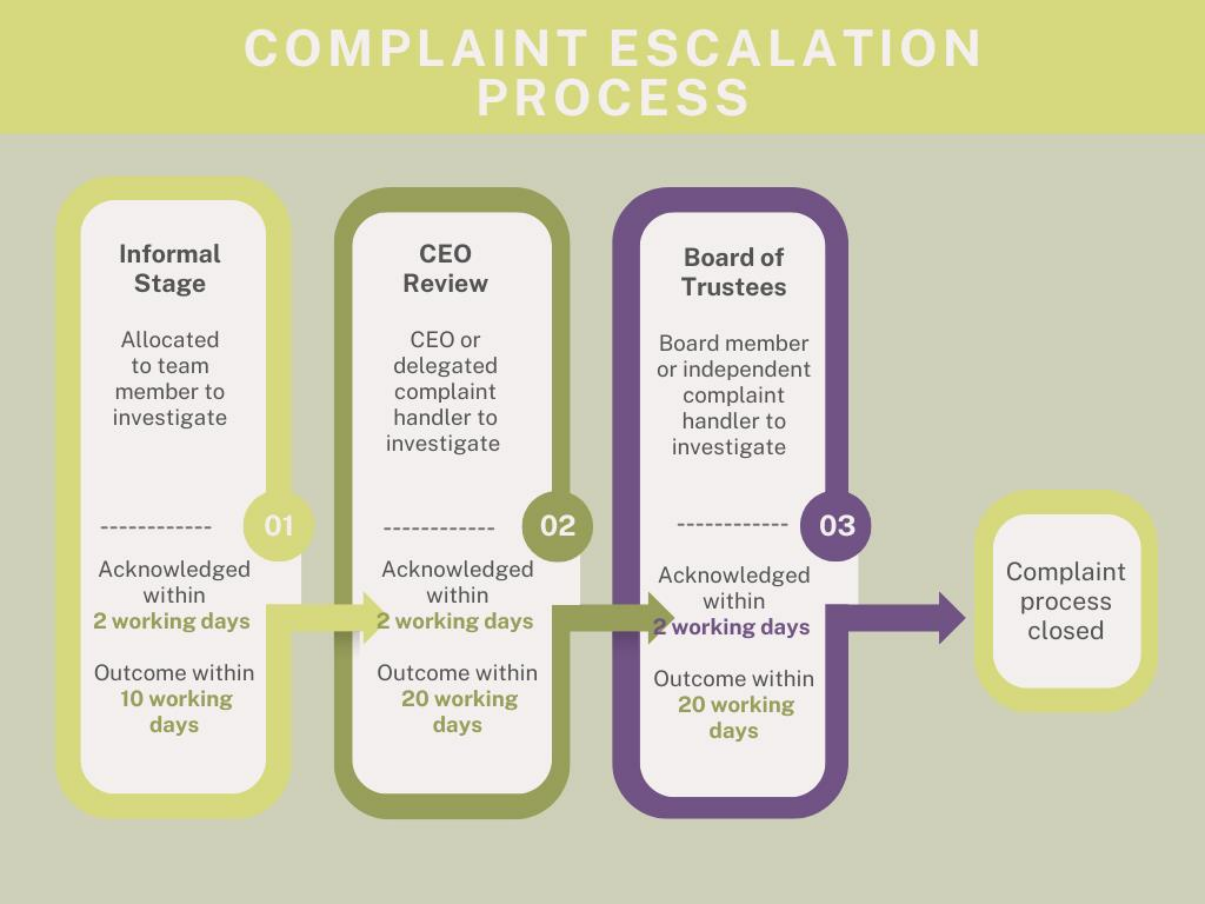
The nominated Board member / complaint handler will:

- Acknowledge the complaint (within two working days).
- Consult all relevant parties.
- Present key findings to Board of Trustees.
- **Provide a written outcome to the complainant (within 20 working days**).

At this point the matter will be considered closed.

Some complaints may be escalated immediately to **Stage Two** if they concern issues related to

- A core member of the Own My Life team, such as the CEO, Development Lead or Finance Administrator.
- Safeguarding Children or Vulnerable Adults (available HERE); Discrimination; or Breaches of Professional Standards - which in the case of Own My Life, includes any breach of the Expectations of Sisterhood.
- A Serious Incident (as defined in our Serious Incident policy).



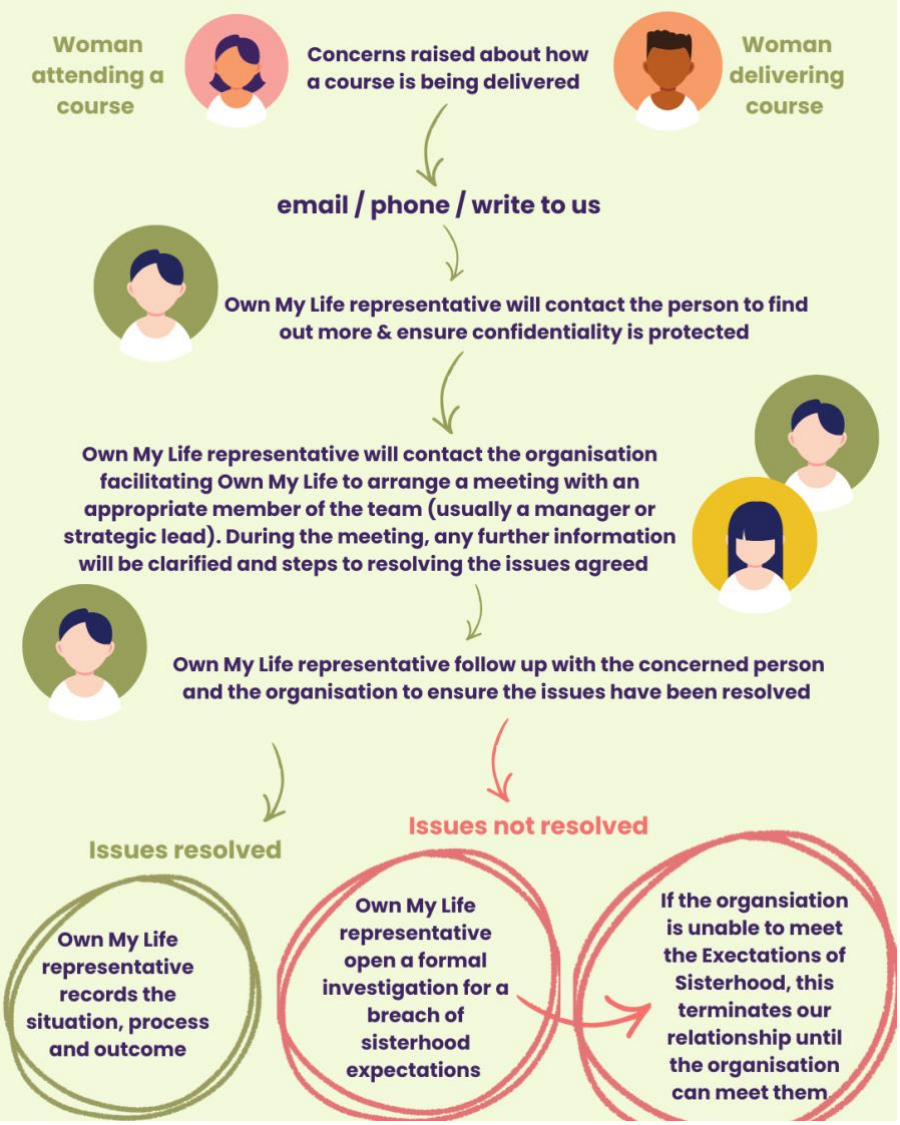
How to make a complaint about a service that is delivering Own My Life

All of the organisations that deliver Own My Life will have their own internal complaints policy. We therefore direct people to follow that process if they have any concerns related to that organisation.

Whilst it is not the role of Own My Life to investigate complaints about other organisations, we **will take seriously** any concerns that relate to a potential breach of the **Expectations of Sisterhood**.

These are a set of working principles that all organisations who deliver Own My Life have committed to upholding. Adhering to our Expectations are important, as it will ensure the best possible experience for the women who are delivering and attending the Own My Life course.

Flowchart in cases of concerns regarding Expectations of Sisterhood



Support for people making a complaint

We want people to feel safe and supported when raising a concern or making a complaint.

We recognise that women who have been subjected to domestic abuse may previously have felt unable to speak up and may find the complaints process difficult.

We will:

- Acknowledge the impact of any potential power imbalance.
- Acknowledge any past experiences of being silenced.
- Provide clear information about our process so people know what to expect from us and within what timescales.
- Where possible, give complainants choice about communications methods.
- Make reasonable adjustments to timescales, or meeting arrangements if required.
- Direct to appropriate support services or encourage the use of a trusted person to accompany the complainant in meetings.

Confidentiality

Own My Life is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of anyone who raises a complaint.

We will do this by:

- Ensuring that information is not shared without consent (unless required by law or in line with safeguarding duties).
- Ensuring that information is recorded, stored, and processed in line with our data protection policy.

Learning from complaints

We treat all complaints as an opportunity to learn and to improve what we do. Where appropriate, learning will be shared internally with the Own My Life team.

The Board of Trustees are notified all of complaints and investigation outcomes.

Vexatious or persistent complainants

We will not treat a complainant differently because they have made a complaint.

However, in a small number of cases, a complainant's behaviour may become unreasonable or vexatious.

This may include (but is not limited to) situations where:

- Complaints are persistently pursued without presenting new information.
- There is an excessive volume of correspondence.
- The desired outcome is unreasonable or unattainable.
- Interactions become abusive or threatening to people working for Own My Life (paid or volunteer).

We have a duty of care to everyone who interacts with our charity, and in these circumstances, we may decide to take action to **stop the complaint process** and related communications.

If this occurs, we will seek to manage the situation in a transparent way. This may include setting clear boundaries around communication, limiting the frequency or method of contact, or confirming that the complaints process has been exhausted.

Any such action will be explained to the complainant and recorded appropriately.

We will not tolerate sexually inappropriate, racist or any other form of abusive or threatening communications and/or callers. We will, if necessary, report to the police and/or other agencies communications and calls that could constitute a hate crime or inappropriate behaviour.

Policy into practice

This policy will be made available to all those who begin working with us, as part of their induction process.

Complaints handling training will be made available to anyone involved in investigating / managing complaints.

Useful Contacts

Own My Life	Main email address	info@ownmylifecourse.org
	Website contact form	Contact Us
	Postal address	The Women's Liberation Collective 19 Stanfield Business Centre Sunderland SR2 8SZ
CEO	Natalie Collins	natalie@ownmylifecourse.org
Chair of the Board of Trustees	Sarah Learmonth	sarahlearmonth66@gmail.com

Version control

VERSION	STATUS	DATE

V1	Sarah Moss - Created	
V3	Reviewed & Approved	Dec 2024
V4	Updated - Hannah Shead	March 2026

OWN MY LIFE COMPLAINTS FORM

Please complete and return to us via email or post.

Name Phone Number Email Preferred method of contact

What is the complaint about? ***Please tell us: When it happened /who was involved and the impact it has had upon you.***

Have you already spoken to anyone at Own My Life about this? ***Please tell us: Who you spoke to and when. What happened?***

What outcome are you hoping for from Own My Life? ***Please tell us: What you think will put it right and what you want to see done differently.***

Do you have any support needs that you want us to be aware of? ***Please tell us: Is there anything that we can do to make this process easier for you.***

Name Signature Date