



Options for Handling Complaints

Which option is best for our club?

There are various informal and formal processes that exist to help address issues raised by a complaint. This document contains information about a number of options that may be suitable for use by your Club or Zone.

If, after reading this document, you are still unsure what you should do, please contact your Zone Representative or PCAV.

Which option is best for my Club?

Informal Processes

Informal processes offer less structured processes such as the complainant taking the issue up themselves or asking for support to directly resolve the matter.

Examples of informal processes are:

- providing more information to the person complaining
- suggesting the person complaining talk directly with person complained about the issue
- the DC or other club official meeting with person complained about
- informal discussion with all those involved facilitated by club official

You might choose an informal process if:

- The issue is not a breach of the law
- The issue raises little or no risk of harm to other people or horses
- The person complaining is not looking to lay blame or wanting disciplinary action

More information on each of the informal alternatives is provided below.

Formal Processes

Formal processes require following more structured processes and involve other (sometimes outside) parties to resolve the issue.

Examples of formal processes are:

- Mediation
- Pony Club Committee Hearing
- Pony Club Committee Inquiry (e.g. President/representative gathers more information & reports back to Committee)
- Escalation within PCAV to Zone or State level
- Referral to external agency

You might choose a formal process if:

- The issue is not unlawful but cannot be resolved easily
- The issue is unlawful and there is a risk of harm to others
- The issue raises concerns related to the welfare of the horse and there is an actual or potential risk of harm to the horse
- There is a conflict of interest
- The complaint has not been resolved in informal processes

More information on each of the formal alternatives is provided below.



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External Processes

All allegations raising very serious issues or unlawful behaviour require urgent action and usually involve an investigation. PCAV also requires these serious and criminal allegations to be reported to it via your Zone Representative or where the matter involves Zone personnel directly to the Coaching Director.

Options for handling very serious complaints include

- Referral to police
- Referral to a child protection authority
- Referral to an anti-discrimination agency

More information on external processes is provided below.

Informal

Providing more information to the person complaining

This is a good option when:

- You have clear guidelines available, eg. By-Laws, Code of Conduct, Gear Rules etc. & it appears to be lack of awareness of these
- The person complaining is seeking greater understanding
- The complaint is in the early stages of the process. Providing information early in the process can help to inform both the person complaining and the club of the available solutions

Recommended steps to follow:

- Provide person complaining with copy of relevant parts of By-Laws, Codes of Conduct and/or relevant guidelines or rule (e.g. selection policy, gear rules)
- Explain how these policies relate to the issue or person's concern

Supporting person complaining to talk directly with person complained about

This is a good option when:

- The person complaining suggests this option
- The complaint is in the early stages of the process
- The focus of the person complaining is to move forward rather than seeking to lay blame
- There isn't a significant power imbalance
- The person complaining is confident and/or isn't concerned about victimisation
- The club can protect the complainant against victimisation (e.g. within club policies)
- The issues are largely factual in nature and there is little emotion involved

Recommended steps to follow:

- If the circumstances are appropriate, ask the person if they would feel comfortable raising the matter with the person directly themselves
- Consider suggesting to the person complaining that they:
 - Be sensitive about when and where the talk takes place (e.g. don't do it in front of riding members or other parents)
 - Avoid being emotional and don't personalise concerns. Provide clear examples (e.g. when, where, who)
 - Focus on the solution rather than problem (e.g. how to move forward rather than seeking to lay blame)



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- Take responsibility to help move forward (e.g. offering to help set up canteen on the morning of pony club, be a team manager)

Meeting with the person complained about

This is a good option when:

- The problem can be resolved by clarifying your clubs policies or rules
- There is a power imbalance between the person complaining and the person complained about
- You yourself have observed the behaviour
- The person complaining requests this option

Recommended steps to follow:

- Find a time to talk privately with the person being complained about (e.g. not in front of riding members or parents)
- Let them know that concerns have been expressed but try not to make the discussion personal (e.g. rather than saying the person is alleged to show favouritism and bias towards their own child say there are concerns that riders are not getting equal time in the lesson)
- Acknowledge their contribution to the club and discuss policies or guidelines that help clarify the club's position on the issue (e.g. rally planning guide)
- Ask for their perspective on the issue and what might have led to this being a concern
- Ask for their ideas on how to sort out the issue
- Check what further support might help them in their role (e.g. swapping their child into another group for those lessons)
- Get back to the person complaining with the outcome and monitor the situation.

Informal discussion with all those involved

This is a good option when:

- The issue is not emotive or aggression isn't involved
- It's appropriate for all parties to hear same message at same time (e.g. clarifying roles and responsibilities)
- The person complaining is open to discussion with other person

Recommended steps to follow:

- Find a time and place when you can get the parties together.
- Reassure both parties that the focus is on talking openly to try and move forward rather than laying blame.
- Make sure both parties have equal 'air time' so they feel heard (e.g the person complaining is concerned about the coach shouting at riders and the coach feels stressed because he has too many riders of varying standards in their class).
- Refer to the club's policies and guidelines to clarify and provide direction (e.g. Codes of Behaviour, roles and responsibilities).
- Identify common ground and build on this for workable solutions (e.g. that the coach needs more support from parents and others in the club to undertake his/her role, make up of groups need reviewing, smaller group sizes for particular activities).
- Allow both parties to suggest solutions (e.g. more parents involve themselves with the team as a helper or rider support., club run internal assessment day to better align groups)
- Follow up with both parties to check that the problem is resolved.



Options for Handling Complaints

Formal

Mediation

This is a good option when:

- The person complaining requests it and the person being complained about is likely to be agreeable to this
- The allegations don't or are unlikely to warrant any form of disciplinary action
- The facts are not likely to be disputed
- There isn't a significant power imbalance between the parties

Recommended steps to follow:

- Explain to the person complaining and the person being complained about that mediation is a process that may help them understand and explore their issues and mutually find resolution with the help of an independent third party
- Get agreement from both parties that they are willing to meet with a mediator to try and sort out their problems
- Contact your Zone Representative or PCAV if it is a Zone matter to discuss the issue and arrange mediation if appropriate. There can be costs associated with paying for a mediator. Your Zone or PCAV can help you source someone suitable.
- Appoint a mediator
- Ensure your club's Committee monitors the situation and reviews policies and procedures to prevent the problem from reoccurring.

Club Committee Decision

This is a good option when:

- The person complaining requests this action
- Mediation is not possible
- There is a possible detriment to either party
- The parties have not been able to resolve the problem themselves
- There is a power imbalance between the parties
- Emotions are aroused
- The circumstances or facts are not agreed – eg. he said, she said
- The matter is unlikely to require an external investigation (e.g. it is not child abuse, physical or sexual assault)
- Disciplinary action is a possibility
- For a repeat of a previous issue or an unresolved matter

Recommended steps to follow:

- Respond in writing to any complaint (written or verbal) and explain the process the club's committee will take in dealing with the complaint.(e.g. a committee hearing).
- For more information and guidance on managing the complaint please refer to PCAV's Guide to managing breaches of the code of conduct
- Inform the person being complained about of the allegations and the process the committee intends to undertake to deal with the complaint.
- Ensure both parties are given an opportunity to tell their side of the story before any decisions are made.



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- Sometimes a decision can be made at a committee hearing at which both parties are asked to attend. This process is suited to rules or policy disputes that require a quick resolution (e.g. when a decision is needed so as not to affect Zone qualifiers or competition participation).
- Alternatively a nominated representative of the committee may be appointed to gather more information and report back to the committee with recommendations before decisions are made (e.g. more serious or sensitive complaints such as sexual or racial harassment, claiming rally attendance for the wrong horse).
- Keep all parties to the complaint informed throughout the process.
- Protect the person complaining and the person being complained about from victimisation.
- Manage any gossip or demands by people who know about the complaint.
- Decisions must be made based on facts. Outcomes could include dismissal of the complaint, disciplinary action, referral to PCAV or Zone for further investigation or referral to an external authority if the seriousness of the matter calls for it.
- Decisions must be clearly communicated to all parties and offer a right of appeal.
- The committee should review its policies and communicate the policies to club members and personnel to prevent further similar issues arising.

Escalation to Zone or PCAV

This is a good option

- When PCAV's By-Laws, policies or your Club's constitution directs that this type of complaint be dealt with at Zone or State level and:
- There is a possible conflict of interest (or close relationship or friendship) between the people on the club's committee and any of the parties to the complaint
- It is beyond the skills of the committee and specific expertise or experience may be required to manage the complaint
- For a repeat of a previous issue that has not been able to be resolved at club level
- The complaint has not been able to be resolved at the club level
- The issue is more serious than first thought

Recommended steps to follow:

- Review PCAV's Code of Conduct and procedures to understand how PCAV deals with complaints.
- Contact your Zone or PCAV's Member Protection Information Officer to discuss the complaint and if and how your zone or PCAV could support your club to handle the complaint.
- If appropriate, refer the complaint to your zone or PCAV and clarify your club's role.
- Keep the parties involved informed about the complaint process.
- Protect the person complaining and the person being complained about from victimisation.
- Manage any gossip or demands by people who know about the complaint.
- Implement any recommendations and review club policy and procedures as appropriate.

Referral to external agency

In the event that any matter is referred to an external agency you will need to notify your Zone Representative and PCAV.

Please contact your Zone Representative or PCAV whenever you are unsure and need to seek further advice as to whether the matter should be referred to an external agency.



Options for Handling Complaints

This is a good option when:

- PCAV's rules and disciplinary procedures do not enable PCAV to be involved in the complaint (eg. your only option may be to seek legal advice) eg. theft of club funds
- The person complaining chooses this option (which can happen at any time during the complaint process) eg. sexual harassment complaint
- After gathering more information, the complaint appears to be very serious eg. stalking allegation
- When the complaint involves harm or the risk of harm to a child
- Where the issue may be criminal or a breach of the law
- When an external investigation is required eg. where too many conflicts of interest arise if PCAV were to investigate. In these circumstances your Zone or PCAV can often still assist you to source an appropriately qualified external party to conduct an investigation.