



Supersedes: Regulations Regarding Client Complaints and Grievances –11/17/2006

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Revised: January 17, 2019

Approved by: President/CEO

## Client Complaints and Grievances Procedure

### I. DEFINITIONS

Client(s) refers to any persons directly receiving services, their family members, or other stakeholders within the community such as referral sources.

The agency refers to Families First Indiana, Inc.

The words complaint and grievance are used interchangeably and refer to an expression of grief, pain, or dissatisfaction.

Critical Incident/Accident = incident, serious occurrence, accident, or grievance that involves the threat of or actual harm, serious injury, or death.

Non-critical Incident/Accident = incident, accident, or grievance that does not involve those specifically mentioned under Critical Incident/Accident; e.g. the incident does not involve threat of or actual harm, serious injury, or death.

### II. INTRODUCTION

Families First, while recognizing that not all criticism is constructive, believes that these expressions are valuable. They often point to ways the agency can improve its programs and service delivery. They may also result in increased confidence and growth on the part of the client as the client may see a positive outcome from having expressed the complaint and they experience its resolution without the threat of retaliation, rejection, or denial of service.

Additionally, as an organization that embraces consistent and constant quality improvement, it is the intention of the agency to encourage and support direct evaluation of agency programs and services, to communicate to both staff and clients that they are participants in an organizational culture which values openness, partnership, and shared responsibility, and respects the dignity of its clients as much as it esteems its own professionalism.

### III. POLICY

1. All clients shall have the right to express complaints about any aspect of the services rendered to them.
2. Clients who enter grievances shall be treated with dignity and respect.
3. There shall be no threat of or actual denial or interruption of service as the result of a client lodging a complaint. Nor, shall there be expressed to the client any rejection,

retribution, or retaliation in any manner or form on account of the client having made the complaint.

4. The expression and pursuit of a complaint or grievance by a client shall not abridge the protection of the client's privacy according to the agency's Policy on Confidentiality and Privacy.
5. Clients shall be informed of their rights with respect to the expression of complaints and grievances.
6. Clients are entitled to a response to their complaints or grievances within a reasonable period, which may vary according to the nature and complexity of the complaint or grievance and the time that may be needed to establish facts and investigate the circumstances of the complaint or grievance.
  - a. In the case of a critical incident/grievance, the report will be reviewed, and contact initiated with applicable parties within 24 hours of the reported incident, excluding non-business days. See [Incident Accident Report Procedure](#) for detailed instructions and additional review information.
  - b. In the case of a non-critical incident/grievance, the client shall receive at least a preliminary response within 30 days of the complaint or grievance. See [Incident Accident Report Procedure](#) for detailed instructions and additional review information.
7. Clients who wish to make their complaints known to the agency's governing body shall be deemed to have gained access to the governing body upon acknowledgment of receiving the complaint, or adjudication of the complaint or grievance, by the President/CEO, who is a member of the Board of Directors.
8. If the complaint or grievance is against the President/CEO, the client shall have the right to make the matter known to another officer of the agency. Any officer of the agency other than the President/CEO may hear and adjudicate client complaints and grievances against the President/CEO.
9. Nothing in these policies or procedures is intended to deprive clients of their rights under law.

#### **IV. PROCESS AND PROCEDURE OVERVIEW**

1. All clients are informed of their right to complain by being given the Client Rights & Responsibilities and/or Notice of Privacy Practices when they first become a client of the agency.
2. All client complaints shall generate the completion of [incident reports](#) by the person to whom the complaint was first stated.
3. Complaints and grievances should be settled, if possible, by discussion between the parties involved. Clients who have complaints or grievances shall be encouraged to express their concern to their counselor, case manager, or advocate.
4. Staff members shall give clients opportunity to state their complaints, seek information about the actions the client wants to have taken in order to resolve the complaint, and shall make a response to the client in a timely manner.

- a. The staff member may involve supervisory or management staff in the resolution of the complaint even if the client has not requested to have the complaint made known to supervisory or management personnel.
  - b. Critical incidents/complaints require immediate supervisor staffing.
5. Staff members shall not admit guilt or fault to the client, nor defend their actions as justified or acceptable.
  - a. The aim is to hear the client's dissatisfaction and attempt to restore the client's confidence in the agency and satisfaction with its services.
  - b. Establishing guilt or innocence is not the aim of the process of resolving client complaints and grievances at Families First.
  - c. Repeated complaints about a staff member may, however, result in a special performance review and corrective or disciplinary actions the circumstances may warrant.
6. If the client is not satisfied with the counselor's response, the client may appeal to the counselor's supervisor, the overseeing director, the Chief Operating Officer or the President/CEO.
  - a. Complaints may also be brought initially to any of these persons.
7. The President/CEO will address complaints and grievances which have not been resolved by the less formal procedures, and which do not appear to be amenable to resolution without a more formal approach.
  - a. Such review will be based on statements and evidence presented by the client and by the staff member(s) against whom the complaint(s) are lodged, and by any supervisor or manager who has been involved in efforts to resolve the problem.
  - b. The President/CEO's review process may include a hearing, which will include all persons who are directly involved in the complaint or in its attempted resolution to date.
8. The President/CEO shall issue a written finding and determination of what action, if any; the agency will take to redress the client's complaint or grievance.
9. The President/CEO's action will be regarded as final.
  - a. In cases of client complaints or grievances against the President/CEO, the officer of the board of directors to whom the complaint was presented will be the reviewing officer if the matter cannot be resolved without formal review.
10. All client complaints formally reviewed by the President/CEO (or by an officer of the board) shall be reported to the board without naming the complainant.
  - a. The report shall state the nature of the complaint, the findings of fact, the relevant circumstances, and the efforts made to resolve the matter, and the outcome of the grievance process.
11. All complaints and their outcome shall be noted in the client record.
12. Complaints shall be reported to the QI/QA Director via [incident report form](#) who shall keep documentation of the complaint, the nature of the complaint, the names of all persons involved, and the outcome of the complaint.
13. If complaint is specific to a staff member, the original documentation shall be filed in the employee's personnel file.

14. A report of all complaints and subsequent actions shall be given to the President/CEO quarterly and reviewed through the Families First Quality improvement Council in a redacted form as needed.
15. Problems in the implementation of these policies and procedures shall be reported to the President/CEO in writing, along with recommended changes for improvement.