



Compliments and Complaints Policy

At Stepping Stones DS (**SSDS**) we are committed to providing a high-quality service for children and young people with Down syndrome, their families and representatives. We make every effort to treat everyone equally and fairly. We continuously try to improve our services, and we value any feedback that will help us to do this.

We encourage and review all comments, feedback and complaints regularly. This helps us to develop the services that work best for you, so please let us know what you think.

Compliments and Comments

If you are happy with the service or have any comments we would love to hear from you. Please speak to one of the trustees, volunteers, sessional workers and/or anyone working on behalf of SSDS, email enquiries@steppingstonesds.co.uk or write to us at the address below.

Complaints

We also want to know if there is any part of our service that you are unhappy with. We take all feedback seriously and we will take action when appropriate to do so. Please do engage with us directly and privately rather than via any social media channels. All complaints will be dealt with in a timely and professional manner. We hope to resolve complaints informally. However, if an investigation is required, we will communicate any updates regularly.

Most complaints about SSDS can be resolved inside the organisation. But where the complaint involves agencies outside of SSDS we will always co-operate fully.

Information held about complaints will be held and processed in line with the principles of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

How to complain

Please note, to enable us to appropriately conduct any necessary investigation, we will only respond to complaints that are made within 6 months of the date of incident unless the complaint involves a safeguarding concern.

Preliminary Stage – Informal

SSDS actively encourages members, volunteers and service providers to communicate any concerns directly to CEO or Finance & Operations Manager in the first instance. The majority of concerns are normally resolved quickly and effectively using this approach. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, the formal component of the process is followed.

Stage One – CEO

If you have a concern that you would like to take up with SSDS you should initially inform the CEO either in person, over the telephone, in writing or by email and enclose any appropriate paperwork with the complaint. Specify clearly which aspect of Stepping Stones DS you wish to make a complaint about.

Please include:

- The specific area, service or resource to which the complaint applies.
- Your name and contact details: this is essential as we will not investigate anonymous complaints. All information will be kept confidential unless there is a safeguarding concern.
- Outline the nature of your complaint as precisely as possible, this will help us to investigate further and hopefully to resolve the issue. Please include details such as the place and time if applicable.
- Please let us know if you have previously reported the complaint, and if any action was taken.

The CEO will acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible – normally within five working days.

A full response will be made within ten working days, usually consisting of a meeting between the complainant and CEO.

After the meeting, we will write to you summarising the main points with the aim of preventing any misunderstandings and ensuring that all parties have a clear record of progress or agreements. This will usually occur within 5 working days of the meeting taking place.

If an in-depth investigation is required, a full response may take longer (particularly if it involves external agencies). This may take up to twenty-eight working days.

Stage Two – Trustees

If you remain dissatisfied, or if the concerns involve the CEO, you should inform the Chair of Trustees in person or over the telephone, in writing or by email, enclosing any relevant paperwork. This should outline the complaint and explain the reasons for pursuing beyond the CEO's response.

The Chair of Trustees (or their representative, who will be another member of the Board) will acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible – normally within five working days.

The Chair of Trustees (or their representative) will review the issues and the CEO's response with the aim of achieving conciliation between all parties. A response will be made within ten working days which usually involves arranging a meeting as soon as possible.

After the meeting, we will write to you summarising the main points with the aim of preventing any misunderstandings and ensuring that all parties have a clear record of progress or agreements. This will usually occur within 5 working days of the meeting taking place.

If an in-depth investigation is required, a full response may take longer (particularly if it involves external agencies). This may take up to twenty-eight working days.

If for any reason you are still unhappy with the response provided by the Board of Trustees, you may contact the Charity Commission. Further details are provided here: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>

How and when we will respond

Response times are outlined above. Please note, we are a small charity, operating largely during term-time only. There may be occasions when we are unable to respond as quickly as we would like. We will always aim to respond to any complaints professionally and in a timely manner. Should there be a need for investigation of any claims, this may extend response times.

Anonymous Complaints

Generally, Stepping Stones DS will not respond to anonymous complaints. Nevertheless, the CEO or Chair of Trustees will need to consider whether the issue and fear of identification are genuine, or whether the issue is one of child protection, and act appropriately.

If your concern affects the safety of a child or vulnerable young adult, please refer immediately to the safeguarding policy and contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead or the Safeguarding Trustee (contact details below).

Legal Framework & Guidance

This Policy takes into account all relevant legal requirements, regulations and guidance, including:

- The Children Acts 1989 and 2004;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018;
- Statutory guidance relevant to SSDS including the Charity Commission;
- Good Governance: a Code for the Voluntary and Community sector.

Contact details

CEO: Kirsten Williams: kirsten@steppingstonesds.co.uk; 07894339172

Operations Manager: Michelle Slater: Michelle@steppingstonesds.co.uk; 07873 220 291

Safeguarding Trustee: Josh McCormack: josh@steppingstonesds.co.uk; 07557 229 695

Telephone: 01252 417014 (office)

Website: www.steppingstonesds.co.uk

Address: SSDS, Sentinel House, Harvest Crescent, Fleet, GU51 2UZ

This policy was adopted onNovember 2023.....

This policy will be reviewed and amended every three years or as necessary, to reflect best practice and/or changes in legislation. All staff or volunteers should pass suggestions or recommendations for the revision of any aspect of the policy through normal channels to a staff member or Chair of Trustees.

Next review date ...November 2026.....